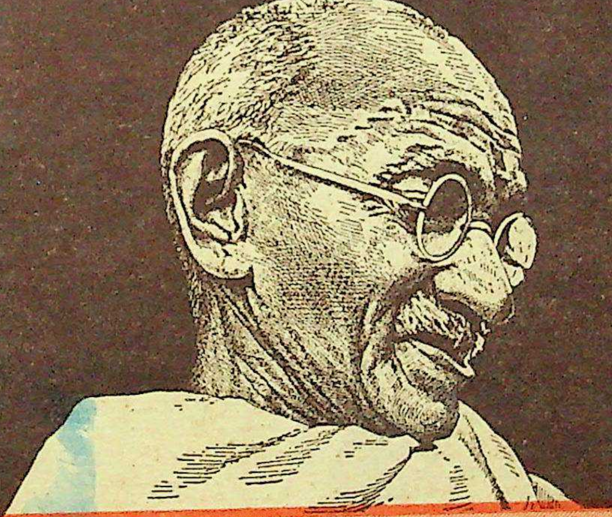
POCKET GANDHI SERIES

THE
MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST



"The message of Jesus, as I understand it, is contained in his Sermon on the Mount. The Spirit of the Sermon on the Mount competes almost on equal terms with the Bhagavad Gita for the domination of my heart. It is that Sermon which has endeared Jesus to me."

MKGandhi

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY 7

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THE
MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

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PREFACE

The message of Jesus Christ, which is essentially the message of Love, is contained, according to Gandhiji, in his *Sermon on the Mount*. The same message, *i.e.*, the Law of Love, is argued out in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Gandhiji did not make any difference between the two. To him it seemed that what the *Sermon* described in a wonderful language and in a graphic manner, the *Gita* reduced to a scientific formula. He derived equal joy and comfort from both. The spirit of the *Sermon on the Mount*, he said, competed on almost equal terms with the *Bhagavad Gita* for the domination of his heart.

Such passages in the *Sermon on the Mount* as: "Resist not him that is evil; but whoso smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also," and "Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you, that ye may be the sons of your Father which is in Heaven," went straight to his heart and echoed something in him which he had learnt in childhood at school from one Gujarati verse, the purport of which was: "If a man gives you a drink of water and you give him drink in return, that is nothing. Real beauty consists in doing good against evil." The idea underlying this verse had made a powerful impression upon him, which was further deepened by the *Bhagavad Gita* and given a permanent form by Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*.

The teaching of the *Sermon on the Mount*—that of non-retaliation and non-resistance to evil—greatly endeared Jesus to Gandhiji and he felt that the *Sermon* was the whole Christianity for him who wanted to live a truly Christian life, that is, a life of a God-fearing man. The rich and radiant personality of Jesus cast a fascinating spell over him. "The gentle figure of Christ," he said, "so patient, so kind, so loving, so full of forgiveness that he taught his followers not to retaliate when abused or struck, but to turn the other cheek —it was a beautiful example, I thought, of the perfect man."

But while Gandhiji held Jesus in the highest esteem and regarded him as one of the greatest teachers of mankind, he, nevertheless, could not bring himself to subscribe to the Christian belief that he was the 'only son of God'. For, he argued that if God could have sons, all of us were his sons. Similarly, while he freely acknowledged the immense moral value of Jesus' teachings, he did not consider everything said in the *Bible* as "the final word of God or exhaustive or even acceptable from the moral standpoint."

That the noble message of the Prince of Peace should have suffered a distortion in the West was extremely painful to Gandhiji. He considered Western Christianity, in its practical working, as "a negation of Christ's Christianity." He deeply deplored its trend towards Mammon worship and confusing Jesus' teachings with what passed as modern civilization.

Being a staunch believer in the equality of all the great religions of the world, Gandhiji was strongly opposed to conversions from one faith to another, especially those where the appeal had gone not to the heart but to the stomach. Religion he regarded as fundamentally a personal matter between oneself and one's Maker; and to the Christian missionaries who believed in preaching, rather aggressively and overenthusiastically, the Gospel of Christ, his advice, tendered in all humility, was that if they wanted people to feel the 'aroma of Christianity', they must copy the rose which irresistibly drew people to itself. "A rose does not need to preach. It simply spreads its fragrance. The fragrance is its own sermon." Therefore, the most effective way of preaching the Gospel that he suggested to the missionaries was to live the Gospel in their own lives and thus let their lives speak to us even as the rose needs no speech but simply spreads its perfume.

It was Gandhiji's firm conviction that the message of Jesus as delivered in his *Sermon on the Mount* was not intended for his twelve peaceful disciples only, but that it was meant for the entire aching humanity. Likewise, he believed that Jesus belonged not solely to Christianity, but to the whole world; to all races and people. But Jesus can in reality belong to us all only when we have succeeded in bringing our way of life into harmony with the virtues that we associate with his divine personality. How nice it would be if we could at least make a sincere effort in that direction!

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THE RAJKOT RECOLLECTIONS

FROM my sixth or seventh year up to my sixteenth I was at school, being taught all sorts of things except religion. I may say that I failed to get from the teachers what they could have given me without any effort on their part. And yet I kept on picking up things here and there from my surroundings. The term 'religion' I am using in its broadest sense, meaning thereby self-realization or knowledge of self.

In Rajkot, however, I got an early grounding in toleration for all branches of Hinduism and sister religions. Only Christianity was at the time an exception. I developed a sort of dislike for it. And for a reason. In those days, Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near the High School and hold forth, pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods. I could not endure this. I must have stood there to hear them once only, but that was enough to dissuade me from repeating the experiment. About the same time, I heard of a well-known Hindu having been converted to Christianity. It was the talk of the town that, when he was baptized, he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes and that thenceforth he began to go about in European costume including a hat. These things got on my nerves. Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor, and change one's own clothes did not deserve the name. I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity.[1]

Morality is the Basis of Things

But one thing took deep root in me, the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day, and my definition of it also has been ever widening.

A Gujarati didactic stanza likewise gripped my mind and heart.

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[1] "Though the preaching took place over forty years ago, the painful memory of it is still vivid before me. What I have heard and read since has but confirmed that first impression. I have read several missionary publications, and they are able to see only the dark side and paint it darker still. The famous hymn of Bishop Heber's—'Greenland's icy mountains'—is a clear libel on Indian humanity. About beef-eating and wine-drinking at baptism, I have merely stated what I heard and I have said as much in my writing. Though I have mixed freely among thousands of Christian Indians, I know very few who have scruples about eating beef or other flesh meats and drinking intoxicating liquors. When I have gently reasoned with them, they have quoted to me the celebrated verse 'Call thou nothing unclean' as if it referred to eating and gave a license for indulgence. I know that many Hindus eat meat, some eat even beef and drink wines. They are not converts. Converts are those who are 'born again' or should be. A higher standard is expected of those who change their faith, if the change is a matter of the heart and not of convenience. But I must not enter into deeper waters."

—*Young India*: March 4, 1926.

Its precept—return good for evil—became my guiding principle. It became such a passion with me that I began numerous experiments in it. Here are those (for me) wonderful lines:[1]

2. ACQUAINTANCE WITH CHRISTIANITY

TOWARDS the end of my second year in England...I met a good Christian from Manchester in a vegetarian boarding house. He talked to me about Christianity. I narrated to him my Rajkot recollections. He was pained to hear them. He said: 'I am a vegetarian, I do not drink. Many Christians are meat-eaters and drink, no doubt; but neither meat-eating nor drinking is enjoined by Scripture. Do please read the *Bible.*' I accepted his advice and he got me a copy. I have a faint recollection that he himself used to sell copies of the *Bible,* and I purchased from him an edition containing maps, concordance, and other aids. I began reading it, but I could not possibly read through the *Old Testament.* I read the book of Genesis, and the chapters that followed invariably sent me to sleep. But just for the sake of being able to say that I had read it, I plodded through the other books with much difficulty and without the least interest or understanding. I disliked reading the book of *Numbers.*

The Sermon On The Mount

But the *New Testament* produced a different impression, especially the *Sermon on the Mount* which went straight to my heart. I compared it with the *Gita.* The verses—'But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also;' and, 'If any man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak too'—delighted me beyond measure and put me in mind of Shamal Bhatt's 'For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal', etc. My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the *Gita, The Light of Asia* and the *Sermon on the Mount.* That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly.

—*My Experiments with Truth*: Part I, Chap. XX.

3. 'RESIST NOT EVIL'

I REMEMBER how one verse of a Gujarati poem which, as a child, I learned at school, clung to me. In substance, it was this:—

"If a man gives you a drink of water and you give him a drink in return that is nothing. Real beauty consists in doing good against evil."

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[1] "For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal;
For a kindly greeting, bow thou down with zeal;
For a simple penny, pay thou back with gold;
If thy life be rescued, life do not withhold.
Thus the words and actions of the wise regard;
Every little service tenfold they reward.
But the truly noble know all men as one,
And return with gladness good for evil done."

—*My Experiments with Truth*: Part I, Chapter X.

As a child, this verse had a powerful influence over me, and I tried to carry it into practice. Then came the *Sermon on the Mount*. Of course, I knew the *Bhagavad Gita* in Sanskrit tolerably well, but I had not made its teaching in that particular a study. It was the *New Testament* which really awakened me to the rightness and value of passive resistance.

When I read in the *Sermon on the Mount* such passages as 'Resist not him that is evil; but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also,' and 'Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you, that ye may be sons of your Father which is in Heaven,' I was simply overjoyed and found my own opinion confirmed where I least expected it. The *Bhagavad Gita* deepened the impression, and Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* gave it permanent form. To me, the ideas which underlie the Gujarati hymn and the *Sermon on the Mount* should revolutionize the whole life. —*Speeches & Writings of M. Gandhi*: P. 130.

4. CHRISTIAN CONTACTS

THE next day, I went to Mr. Baker's prayer-meeting. There, I was introduced to Miss Harris, Miss Gabb, Mr. Coates and others. Everyone kneeled down to pray and I followed suit. The prayers were supplications to God for various things, according to each person's desire. Thus, the usual forms were for the day to be passed peacefully, or for God to open the doors of the heart.

A prayer was now added for my welfare: 'Lord, show the path to the new brother, who has come amongst us. Give him, Lord, the peace that Thou hast given us. May the Lord Jesus who has saved us save him, too. We ask all this in the name of Jesus.' There was no singing of hymns or other music at these meetings. After the supplication for something special every day, we dispersed, each going to his lunch, that being the hour for it. The prayer did not take more than five minutes.

The Misses Harris and Gabb were both elderly maiden ladies. Mr. Coates was a Quaker. The two ladies lived together, and they gave me a standing invitation to four o'clock tea, at their house, every Sunday.

When we met on Sundays, I used to give Mr. Coates my religious diary for the week, and discuss with him the books I had read and the impression they had left on me. The ladies used to narrate their sweet experiences, and talk about the peace they had found.

Mr. Coates was a frank-hearted, staunch young man. We went out for walks together, and he also took me to other Christian friends.

I Read Books on Christianity

As we came closer to each other, he began to give me books of his own choice, until my shelf was filled with them. He loaded me with books, as it were. In pure faith I consented to read all those books, and, as I went on reading them, we discussed them.

I read a number of such books in 1893. I do not remember the names of them all, but they included the *Commentary* of Dr. Parker of the City Temple, Pearson's *Many Infallible Proofs* and Butler's *Analogy*. Parts of these were unintelligible to me. I liked some things in them, while I did not like others. *Many Infallible Proofs* were proofs in support of the religion of the Bible as the author understood it. The book had no effect on me. Parker's *Commentary* was morally stimulating, but it could not be of any help to one who had no faith in the prevalent Christian beliefs. Butler's *Analogy* struck me to be a very profound and difficult book, which should be read four or five times to be understood properly. It seemed to me to be written with a view to converting atheists to theism. The arguments advanced in it regarding the existence of God were unnecessary for me, as I had then passed the stage of unbelief: but the arguments in proof of Jesus being the only incarnation of God and the Mediator between God and man left me unmoved.

Superstition?

But Mr. Coates was not the man easily to accept defeat. He had great affection for me. He saw, round my neck, the *Vaishnava* necklace of Tulasi-beads. He thought it to be superstition, and was pained by it. 'This superstition does not become you. Come, let me break the necklace.'

'No, you will not. It is a sacred gift from my mother.'

'But do you believe in it?'

'I do not know its mysterious significance. I do not think I should come to harm if I did not wear it. But I cannot, without sufficient reason, give up a necklace that she put round my neck out of love and in the conviction that it would be conducive to my welfare. When, with the passage of time, it wears away and breaks of its own accord, I shall have no desire to get a new one. But this necklace cannot be broken.'

Mr. Coates could not appreciate my argument, as he had no regard for my religion. He was looking forward to delivering me from the abyss of ignorance. He wanted to convince me that, no matter whether there was some truth in other religions, salvation was impossible for me unless I accepted Christianity which represented *the* truth, and that my sins would not be washed away except by the intercession of Jesus, and that all good works were useless.

The Plymouth Brethren

Just as he introduced me to several books, he introduced me to several friends whom he regarded as staunch Christians. One of these introductions was to a family which belonged to the Plymouth Brethren, a Christian sect.

Many of the contacts for which Mr. Coates was responsible were good. Most struck me as being God-fearing. But during my contact with this family, one of the Plymouth Brethren confronted me with an argument for which I was not prepared:

'You cannot understand the beauty of our religion. From what you say, it appears, that you must be brooding over your transgressions every moment of your life, always mending them and atoning for them. How can this ceaseless cycle of action bring you redemption? You can never have peace. You admit that we are all sinners. Now, look at the perfection of our belief. Our attempts at improvement and atonement are futile. And yet redemption we must have. How can we bear the burden of sin? We can but throw it on Jesus. He is the only sinless Son of God. It is His word that those who believe in Him shall have everlasting life. Therein lies God's infinite mercy. And as we believe in the atonement of Jesus, our own sins do not bind us. Sin we must. It is impossible to live in this world sinless. And, therefore, Jesus suffered and atoned for all the sins of mankind. Only he who accepts His great redemption can have eternal peace. Think what a life of restlessness is yours, and what a promise of peace we have.'

Redemption from Sin

The argument utterly failed to convince me. I humbly replied:

'If this be the Christianity acknowledged by all Christians, I cannot accept it. I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless.'

To which the Plymouth Brother rejoined: 'I assure you, your attempt is fruitless. Think again over what I have said.'

And the Brother proved as good as his word. He knowingly committed transgressions and showed me that he was undisturbed by the thought of them.

But I already knew before meeting with these friends, that all Christians did not believe in such a theory of atonement. Mr. Coates himself walked in the fear of God. His heart was pure, and he believed in the possibility of self-purification. The two ladies also shared this belief. Some of the books that came into my hands were full of devotion. So, although Mr. Coates was very much disturbed by this latest experience of mine. I was able to reassure him and tell him that the distorted belief of a Plymouth Brother could not prejudice me against Christianity.

My difficulties lay elsewhere. They were with regard to the *Bible* and its accepted interpretation.

—*My Experiments with Truth*: Part II, Chapter XI.

5. THE WELLINGTON CONVENTION

MR. BAKER was getting anxious about my future. He took me to the Wellington Convention. The Protestant Christians organize such gatherings every few years for religious enlightenment or, in other words, self-purification. One may call this religious restoration or revival. The Wellington Convention was of this type. The chairman was the famous divine of the place, the Rev. Andrew Murray. Mr. Baker had hoped that the atmosphere of religious exaltation at the Convention, and the enthusiasm and earnestness of the people attending it, would inevitably lead me to embrace Christianity.

But his final hope was the efficacy of prayer. He had an abiding faith in prayer. It was his firm conviction that God could not but listen to prayer fervently offered. He would cite the instances of men like George Muller of Bristol, who depended entirely on prayer even for his temporal needs. I listened to his discourse on the efficacy of prayer with unbiassed attention, and assured him that nothing could prevent me from embracing Christianity, should I feel the call. I had no hesitation in giving him this assurance, as I had long since taught myself to follow the inner voice. I delighted in submitting to it. To act against it would be difficult and painful to me.

So we went to Wellington. This Convention was an assemblage of devout Christians. I was delighted at their faith. I met the Rev. Murray. I saw that many were praying for me. I liked some of their hymns, they were very sweet.

The Convention lasted for three days. I could understand and appreciate the devoutness of those who attended it. But I saw no reason for changing my belief—my religion. It was impossible for me to believe that I could go to heaven or attain salvation only by becoming a Christian. When I frankly said so to some of the good Christian friends, they were shocked. But there was no help for it.

My Difficulties

My difficulties lay deeper. It was more than I could believe that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God, and that only he who believed in him would have everlasting life. If God could have sons, all of us were his sons. If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself. My reason was not ready to believe literally that Jesus, by his death and by his blood, redeemed the sins of the world. Metaphorically, there might be some truth in it. Again, according to Christianity, only human beings had souls, and not other living beings, for whom death meant complete extinction; while I held a contrary belief. I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on the Cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it, my heart could not accept. The pious lives of Christianity did not give me anything that the lives of men of other faiths had failed to give. I had seen in other lives just the same reformation that I had heard of among Christians. Philosophically, there was nothing extraordinary in Christian principles. From the point of view of sacrifice, it seems to me that the Hindus greatly surpassed the Christians. It was impossible for me to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions.

Mental Churning

I shared this mental churning with my Christian friends whenever there was an opportunity, but their answers could not satisfy me.

I communicated with Christian friends in England. One of them introduced me to Edward Maitland, with whom I opened correspondence. He sent me *The Perfect Way*, a book he had written in collaboration with Anna Kingsford. The book was a repudiation of the current Christian belief. He also sent me another book, *The New Interpretation of the Bible*. I liked both. They seemed to support Hinduism. Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me. Before the independent thinking, profound morality, and the truthfulness of this book, all the books given me by Mr. Coates seemed to pale into insignificance.

My studies thus carried me in a direction unthought of by the Christian friends. My correspondence with Edward Maitland was fairly prolonged.

Though I took a path my Christian friends had not intended for me, I have remained for ever indebted to them for the religious quest that they awakened in me. I shall always cherish the memory of their contact. The years that followed had more, not less, of such sweet and sacred contacts in store for me.

—*My Experiments with Truth*: Part II, Chap. XV.

6. TO THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

MY association with Christians—not Christians so-called but real Christians—dates from 1889 when as a lad I found myself in London; and that association has grown riper as years have rolled on. In South Africa, where I found myself in the midst of inhospitable surroundings, I was able to make hundreds of Christian friends.

There was even a time in my life when a very sincere and intimate friend of mine, a great and good Quaker, had designs on me. He thought that I was too good not to become a Christian. I was sorry to have disappointed him. One missionary friend of mine in South Africa still writes to me and asks me: 'How is it with you?' I have always told this friend that, so far as I know, it is all well with me. If it was prayer that these friends expected me to make, I was able to tell them that every day the heart-felt prayer within the closed door of my closet went to the Almighty to show me light and give wisdom and courage to follow that light.

My Search for True Path

In answer to promises made to one of these Christian friends of mine, I thought it my duty to see one of the biggest of Indian Christians, as I was told he was,—the late Kali Charan Banerjee. I went over to him—I am telling you of the deep search that I have undergone in order that I might leave no stone unturned to find out the true path—I went to him with an absolutely open mind and in a receptive mood, and I met him also under circumstances which were most affecting. I found that there was much in common between Mr. Banerjee and myself. His simplicity, his humility, his courage, his truthfulness, all these things I have all along admired. He met me when his wife was on her death-bed. You cannot imagine a more impressive scene, a more ennobling circumstance. I told Mr. Banerjee: 'I have come to you as a seeker'—this was in 1901—'I have come to you in fulfilment of a sacred promise I have made to some of my dearest Christian friends that I will leave no stone unturned to find out the true light.' I told him that I had given my friends the assurance that no worldly gain would keep me away from the light, if I could but see it. Well, I am not going to engage you in giving a description of the little discussion that we had between us.[1] It was very good, very noble. I came away, not sorry, not dejected, not disappointed, but I felt sad that even Mr. Banerjee could not convince me. This was my final, deliberate striving to realize Christianity as it was presented to me. Today my position is that, though I admire much in Christianity, I am unable to identify myself with orthodox Christianity.

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[1] "Without much ado, I presented my difficulties to him. He asked: 'Do you believe in the doctrine of original sin?'

'I do,' said I.

'Well then, Hinduism offers no absolution therefrom, Christianity does,' and added: 'The wages of sin is death, and the *Bible* says that the only way of deliverance is surrender unto Jesus.'

I put forward the *Bhakti-marga* (the path of devotion) of the *Bhagavad Gita*, but to no avail. I thanked him for his goodness. He failed to satisfy me, but I benefited by the interview."

—*Young India*: April 7, 1927.

Hinduism Satisfies My Soul

I must tell you in all humility that Hinduism, as I know it, entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being, and I find a solace in the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads* that I miss even in the *Sermon on the Mount.* Not that I do not prize the ideal presented therein, not that some of the precious teachings in the *Sermon on the Mount* have not left a deep impression upon me, but I must confess to you that when doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the *Bhagavad Gita* and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and, if they have not left any visible and indelible effect on me, I owe it to the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita.*

All Religions are True but Imperfect

I have told you all these things in order to make it absolutely clear to you where I stand, so that I may have, if you will, closer touch with you. I must add that I did not stop at studying the *Bible* and the commentaries and other books on Christianity that my friends placed in my hands; but I said to myself, if I was to find my satisfaction through reasoning, I must study the scriptures of other religions also and make my choice. And, I turned to the *Quran.* I tried to understand what I could of Judaism as distinguished from Christianity. I studied Zoroastrianism and I came to the conclusion that all religions were right but every one of them was imperfect,[1] imperfect naturally and necessarily, because they were interpreted with our poor intellects, sometimes with our poor hearts, and more often misinterpreted. In all religions I found, to my grief, that there were various and even contradictory interpretations of some texts, and I said to myself: 'Not these things for me. If I want the satisfaction of my soul, I must feel my way. I must wait silently upon God and ask Him to guide me.' There is a beautiful verse in Sanskrit which says: 'God helps only when man feels utterly helpless and utterly humble.' When I was studying Tamil, I found in one of the books of Dr. Pope a Tamil proverb which means 'God helps the helpless.' I have given you this life-story of my own experience for you to ponder over.

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[1] "I hold that all religions are true but imperfect, inasmuch as they are presented through human agency and bear the impress of the imperfections and frailties of the human beings. My quarrel with missionaries is that they think no religion other than Christianity is true." —*Harijan*: Feb. 25, 1939.

You, the missionaries, come to India thinking that you come to a land of heathens, of idolaters, of men who do not know God. One of the greatest of Christian divines, Bishop Heber, wrote the two lines which have always left a sting with me: 'Where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile.' I wish he had not written them. My own experience, in my travels throughout India, has been to the contrary. I have gone from one end of the country to the other, without any prejudice, in a relentless search after Truth, and I am not able to say that here in this fair land, watered by the great Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Jumna, man is vile. He is not vile. He is as much a seeker after Truth as you and I are, possibly more so. This reminds me of a French book, translated for me by a French friend. It is an account of an imaginary expedition in search of knowledge. One party landed in India and found Truth and God personified in a little *Pariah's* hut. I tell you there are many such huts belonging to the untouchables where you will certainly find God. They do not reason, but they persist in their belief that God is. They depend upon God for His assistance and find it, too. There are many stories told throughout the length and breadth of India about these noble untouchables. Vile as some of them may be, there are noblest specimens of humanity in their midst. But does my experience exhaust itself merely with the untouchables? No, I am here to tell you that there are non-*Brahmins*, there are *Brahmins* who are as fine specimens of humanity as you will find in any place on the earth. There are *Brahmins* today in India who are embodiments of self-sacrifice, godliness, and humility. There are *Brahmins* who are devoting themselves body and soul to the service of untouchables, with no expectation of reward from the untouchables, but with execration from orthodoxy. They do not mind it, because in serving *Pariahs* they are serving God. I can quote chapter and verse from my experience. I place these facts before you in all humility for the simple reason that you may know this land better, the land to which you have come to serve. You are here to find out the distress of the people of India and remove it. But I hope you are here also in a receptive mood, and if there is anything that India has to give, you will not stop your ears, you will not close your eyes, and steel your hearts, but open up your ears, eyes and, most of all, your hearts to receive all that may be good in this land. I give you my assurance that there is a great deal of good in India. Do not flatter yourselves with the belief that a mere recital of that celebrated verse in St. John makes a man a Christian. If I have read the *Bible* correctly, I know many men who have never heard the name of Jesus

Christ or have even rejected the official interpretation of Christianity will, probably, if Jesus came in our midst today in the flesh, be owned by him more than many of us. I, therefore, ask you to approach the problem before you with open-heartedness and humility.

Presence of Living Christ

Q. Do you definitely feel the presence of the living Christ within you?

A. If it is the historical Jesus surnamed Christ that you refer to, I must say I do not. If it is an adjective signifying one of the names of God, then I must say I do feel the presence of God—call Him Christ, call Him Krishna, call Him Rama. We have one thousand names to denote God, and if I did not feel a presence of God within me, I see so much of misery and disappointment every day that I would be a raving maniac and my destination would be the Hooghli.[1]

—*Young India*: Aug. 6, 1925.

7. FROM LETTERS TO ESTHER FEARING

I

Christian Charity

YOU have to summon to your aid all your Christian charity to be able to return largeness against pettiness. And we are truly large only when we are that joyfully. I have known friends being generous in a miserable spirit. Their generosity has become a kind of martyrdom. To rejoice in suffering, to pity the person who slights you, and to love him all the more for his weakness, is really charity. But we may not be able to reach that stage. Then, we should not experiment. And so, my dear Esther, if you find A trying your nerves, you must avoid the close association. On no account shall I have you to lose your inward peace and joy. I want you so to order your life that the *Ashram* gives you greater joy, greater happiness and finer perception of Truth. I want you to be a greater Christian for being in the *Ashram*. You were with me the whole of yesterday and during the night. I shall pray that you may be healtheir in mind, body and spirit so as to be a better instrument of His service.[2]

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[1] "As days pass, I feel this Living Presence in every fibre of my veins. Without that feeling I should be demented. There are so many things that are calculated to disturb my peace of mind. So many events happen that would, without the realization of that Presence, shake me to the very foundation. But they pass me by, leaving me practically untouched." —*Bapu's Letters to Mira*: P. 268.

[2] "When you render yourself a willing instrument of service, inexpressible joy is the reward." —*My Dear Child*: P. 43.

II

The Presence of God

As I have already said, you have come to the *Ashram* not to lose your Christianity, but to perfect it. If you do not feel the presence of God at the prayer meetings, then, remember, that the names Rama and Krishna signify the same as Jesus to you.

Your coming is a joy to me. It will be a greater joy if, upon experience, you find it gives you peace, health and real joy and if it thereby enables the other Christians to see that God and Christianity can be found also in institutions that do not call themselves Christian, and that Truth is the same in all religions though, through refraction, it appears for the time being variegated even as light does through a prism.

III

Meaning of 'Resist Not Evil'

'Resist not evil' has a much deeper meaning than appears on the surface. The evil in A., for instance, must not be resisted; you or, for that matter, I must not fret over it or be impatient and say to ourselves: 'Why will not this woman see the truth or return the love I give her.' She can no more go against her nature than a leopard can change his spots. If you or I love, we act according to our nature. If she does not respond, she acts according to hers. And if we worry, we 'resist evil.' I feel that *that* is the deeper meaning of the injunction. And so, in your dealings with everybody I want you to keep your equanimity.

IV

The Uniqueness of Jesus

In spite of most devout attention to every word ascribed to Jesus in the *New Testament,* and in spite of my having read in a humble spirit all about Jesus, I have really not seen any fundamental distinction between Jesus and the other teachers I can understand, explain and appreciate. Nobody taught me in my childhood to differentiate. I have, therefore, grown without bias one way or the other. I can pay equal homage to Jesus, Mohamed, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster and others that may be named. But this is not a matter for argument. It is a matter for each one's deep and sacred conviction. I have no desire whatsoever to dislodge you from the exclusive homage you pay to Jesus. But I would like you to understand and appreciate the other inclusive position.

V

The Cross Makes a Universal Appeal

The Cross, undoubtedly, makes a universal appeal the moment you give it a universal meaning in place of the narrow one that is often heard at ordinary meetings. But, then, you have to have the eyes of the soul with which to contemplate it.

—*My Dear Child*: Pp. 39, 45, 50, 86, 100

8. WHY I DID NOT BECOME A CHRISTIAN

GANDHIJI: I did once seriously think of embracing the Christian faith. The gentle figure of Christ, so patient, so kind, so loving, so full of forgiveness that he taught his followers not to retaliate when abused or struck, but to turn the other cheek—I thought it was a beautiful example of the perfect man.

Mrs. Polak: But you did not embrace Christianity, did you?

Gandhiji: No. I studied your Scriptures for some time and thought earnestly about them. I was tremendously attracted to Christianity, but, eventually, I came to the conclusion that there was nothing really in your Scriptures that we had not got in ours, and that to be a good Hindu also meant that I would be a good Christian. There was no need for me to join your creed to be a believer in the beauty of the teachings of Jesus or to try to follow his example.

Mrs. Polak: Of course, it is what a man is that counts, not what he calls himself. But, tell me, do you believe in conversion, in changing from one form of faith to another?

Gandhiji: What do you feel yourself?

Mrs. Polak: It does not please me, somehow. I could not do it.

Gandhiji: I think that is right. If a man reaches the heart of his own religion, he has reached the heart of the others, too. There is only one God, but there are many paths to Him.[1]

Mrs. Polak: If Karma and re-incarnation be true, we are born into the faith to which we belong, and the one most suitable at the moment for our development. So, we should not change.

Teaching of Christianity

Gandhiji: What do you think is the essential lesson for man in the teaching of Christianity?

Mrs. Polak: I could think of two or three; but the one that stands out strongest in my mind at the moment is *Love*, which is expressed in the words: 'One is your Master, Christ, and all ye are brethren.'

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[1] "Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals."

—*Hind Swaraj*: P. 36 (1946 Ed.)

Gandhiji: Yes, and Hinduism teaches the same great truth, and Mohammedanism and Zoroastrianism, too.

Mrs. Polak: Do you think Hinduism does teach 'all men are brothers' as Christianity does?

Gandhiji: Do not take men's imperfect interpretation, as you see it, for the real teaching of any great faith. You would not suggest to me that the Christian world lives as brothers, would you? Think of its wars, its hatreds, its poverty and its crime?

Mrs. Polak: That is true. I suppose the ideals of mankind are always far ahead of them, and men and women are very much the same in whatever part of the world you find them.

Gandhiji: If we realized our ideals, they would cease to be ideals. We should have nothing to strive for.[1]

—*Mr. Gandhi: The Man*: P. 40.

9. FOR CHRISTIAN INDIANS

WHEN I was a youth, I remember a Hindu having become a convert to Christianity. The whole town understood that the initiation took the shape of this well-bred Hindu partaking of beef and brandy in the name of Jesus Christ, and discarding his national costume. I learnt in later years that such a convert, as so many of my missionary friends put it, came to a life of freedom out of a life of bondage, to a life of plenty out of one of penury. As I wander about throughout the length and breadth of India, I see many Christian Indians almost ashamed of their birth, certainly of their ancestral religion, and of their ancestral dress. The aping of Europeans on the part of Anglo-Indians is bad enough, but the aping of them by Indian converts is a violence done to their country and, shall I say, even to their new religion. There is a verse in the *New Testament* to bid Christians avoid meat, if it would offend their neighbours. Meat here, I presume, includes drink and dress. I can appreciate uncompromising avoidance of all that is evil in the old, but where there is not only no question of anything evil but where an ancient practice may be even desirable, it would be a crime to part with it when one knows for certain that the giving up would deeply hurt relatives and friends.

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[1] "The ideal will cease to be one if it becomes possible to realize it. The pleasure lies in making the effort, not in its fulfilment. For, in our progress towards the goal, we even see more and more enchanting scenery."

—*Harijan*: July 12, 1937

What Conversion should Mean

Conversion must not mean denationalization.[1] Conversion should mean a definite giving up of the evil of the old, adoption of all the good of the new and a scrupulous avoidance of everything evil in the new. Conversion, therefore, should mean a life of greater dedication to one's own country, greater surrender to God, greater self-purification. Years ago, I met the late Kali Charan Bannerjee. Had I not known before I went there that he was a Christian, I should certainly not have noticed from the outward appearance of his home that he was one. It was no different from an ordinary modern Hindu home,—simple and meagre in furniture. The great man was dressed like an ordinary un-Europeanized Hindu Bengali. I know that there is a marvellous change coming over Christian Indians. There is on the part of a large number of them a longing to revert to original simplicity, a longing to belong to the nation and to serve it, but the process is too slow. There need be no waiting. It requires not much effort. The late Principal Rudra and I used often to discuss this evil tendency. I well remember how he used to deplore it. I am offering a tribute to the memory of a dead friend when I inform the reader that he used often to express his grief that it was too late in life for him to change some of the unnecessary European habits to which he was brought up. Is it not truly deplorable that many Christian Indians discard their own mother-tongue, bring up their children only to speak in English? Do they not thereby completely cut themselves adrift from the nation in whose midst they have to live? But they may answer in self-defence that many Hindus, and even Mussalmans, have become denationalized. The *Tu Quoque* argument serves no useful purpose. I am writing not as a critic but as a friend who has enjoyed the closest intimacy with hundreds of Christian Indians. I want my missionary friends and Christian Indians to reciprocate the spirit in which these lines are written. I write in the name and for the sake of heart unity which I want to see established among the people of this land professing different faiths. In Nature, there is a fundamental unity running through all the diversity we see about us. Religions are no exception to the natural law. They are given to mankind so as to accelerate the process of realization of fundamental unity.

—*Young India*: Aug. 20, 1925.

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[1] "It is not at all, in my humble opinion, necessary for a single Indian to cease to be Indian because he calls himself a Christian. To accept Christianity or to make a change in one's religion is the acceptance of a new life, and, therefore, I should expect anyone who changes his religion with a true heart to broaden his own nationality. If he ceases to think of his neighbours, he is not likely to think beyond the limit of his neighbours. I say this to Christian friends, Mussalman friends and all those who have made India their home or to whom India is the land of their birth."

—*Young India*: Sept. 29, 1927.

10. APPEAL TO CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

HINDUISM has become a conservative religion and, therefore, a mighty force. It is the most tolerant because it is non-proselytizing, and it is as capable of expansion to-day as it has been found to be in the past. A Hindu refuses to change his religion, not necessarily because he considers it to be the best, but because he knows that he can complement it by introducing reforms. And what I have said about Hinduism is, I suppose, true of the other great faiths of the world, only it is held that it is specially so in the case of Hinduism.

If there is any substance in what I have said, will not the great missionary bodies of India, to whom she owes a deep debt of gratitude for what they have done and are doing, do still better and serve the spirit of Christianity better by dropping the goal of proselytizing while continuing their philanthropic work? I hope you will not consider this to be an impertinence on my part. I make the suggestion in all sincerity and with due humility. Moreover, I have some claim upon your attention.

I have endeavoured to study the *Bible*. I consider it as part of my scriptures. The spirit of the *Sermon on the Mount* competes almost on equal terms with the *Bhagavad Gita* for the domination of my heart. I yield to no Christian in the strength of devotion with which I sing: 'Lead kindly Light' and several other inspired hymns of a similar nature. I have come under the influence of noted Christian missionaries belonging to different denominations. And I enjoy to this day the privilege of friendship with some of them. You will perhaps, therefore, allow that I have offered the above suggestion not as a biased Hindu, but as an humble and impartial student of religion with great leanings towards Christianity. May it not be that 'Go ye unto all the world' message has been somewhat narrowly interpreted and the spirit of it missed? It will not be denied, I speak from experience, that many of the conversions are only so-called. In some cases, the appeal has gone not to the heart but to the stomach. And, in every case, a conversion leaves a sore behind it which, I venture to think, is avoidable.

Quoting again from experience, a new birth, a change of heart is perfectly possible in every one of the great faiths. I know I am now treading upon thin ice. But I do not apologize for saying that the frightful outrage that is just going on in Europe, perhaps shows that the message of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Peace, has been little understood in Europe,[1] and that light upon it may have to be thrown from the East.

—*Speeches & Writings of M. Gandhi*: P. 336, Feb. 14, 1916

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[1] "It is my firm opinion that Europe to-day represents not the spirit of God or Christianity, but the spirit of Satan. And Satan's successes are the greatest when he

11. MORAL PROGRESS v. MATERIAL PROGRESS

DOES economic progress clash with real progress? By economic progress, I take it, we mean material advancement without limit; and by real progress we mean moral progress, which again is the same thing as progress of the permanent element in us. The only statement that has to be examined is, whether it can be laid down as a law of universal application that material advancement means moral progress.

Now, let us take a few illustrations. Rome suffered a moral fall when it attained high material affluence. So did Egypt, and so perhaps most countries of which we have any historical record. The descendants and kinsmen of the royal and divine Krishna too, fell when they were rolling in riches. We do not deny to the Rockefellers and the Carnegies possession of an ordinary measure of morality, but we gladly judge them indulgently. I mean that we do not even expect them to satisfy the highest standard of morality. With them material gain has not necessarily meant moral gain.

Question Asked of Jesus

The question we are asking ourselves is not a new one. It was addressed of Jesus two thousand years ago. St. Mark has vividly described the scene. Jesus is in his solemn mood. He is earnest. He talks of Eternity. He knows the world about him. He himself is the greatest economist of his time. He succeeded in economizing time and space—he transcended them. It is to him at his best that one comes running, kneels down, and asks: "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit Eternal Life?"

And, Jesus said unto him: "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God. Thou knowest the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother."

And, he answered and said unto him: "Master, all these have I observed from my youth."

Then, Jesus beholding him loved him and said unto him: "One thing thou lackest. Go thy way, sell whatever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shall have treasure in heaven—come, take up the Cross and follow me."

And, he was sad at that saying and went away grieved—for, he had great possession. And, Jesus looked round about and said unto

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appears with the name of God on his lips. Europe is to-day only nominally Christian. In reality, it is worshipping Mammon. 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.' Thus really spoke Jesus Christ. His so-called followers measure their moral progress by their material possessions."
—*Young India*: Sept. 8, 1920.

his disciple: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God."

And, the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again and said unto them: "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God!"

Eternal Rule of Life

Here, you have an eternal rule of life stated in the noblest words the English language is capable of producing. But the disciples nodded unbelief, as we do even to this day. To him they said as we say to-day: "But look, how the law fails in practice. If we sell all and have nothing, we shall have nothing to eat. We must have money or we cannot even be reasonably moral." So, they state their case thus: And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves: "Who, then, can be saved?"

And Jesus, looking upon them, said: "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for, with God all things are possible."

Then, Peter began to say unto him: "Lo, we have left all, and have followed Thee."

And Jesus answered and said: "Verily, I say unto you there is no man that has left house or brethren or sisters, or father or mother, or wife or children or lands for my sake and Gospel's but he shall receive one hundredfold, now in this time houses and brethren and sisters and mothers and children and land, and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last and the last, first."

Reward of Following the Law

You have here the result or reward, if you prefer the term, of following the law. I have not taken the trouble of copying similar passages from the other non-Hindu scriptures and I will not insult you by quoting in support of the law stated by Jesus passages from the writings and sayings of our own sages, passages even stronger, if possible, than the Biblical extracts I have drawn your attention to. Perhaps, the strongest of all the testimonies in favour of the affirmative answer to the question before us are the lives of the greatest teachers of the world. Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya, Shankara, Dayanand, Ramkrishna were men who exercised an immense influence over and moulded the character of thousands of men. The world is the richer for their having lived in it. And they were all men who deliberately embraced poverty as their lot.

—*Speeches and Writings of M. Gandhi*: P. 254, Dec. 22, 1916.

12. NEGATION OF CHRIST'S CHRISTIANITY

I CONSIDER Western Christianity in its practical working a negation of Christ's Christianity. I cannot conceive Jesus, if he was living in the flesh in our midst, approving of modern Christian organizations, public worship or modern ministry. If Indian Christians will simply cling to the *Sermon on the Mount,* which was delivered not merely to the peaceful disciples but a groaning world, they would not go wrong, and they would find that no religion is false; and that if all live according to their lights and in the fear of God, they would not need to worry about organizations, forms of worship and ministry. The Pharisees had all that, but Jesus would have none of it, for they were using their office as a cloak for hypocrisy and worse.[1] Co-operation with forces of Good and non-cooperation with forces of Evil are the two things we need for a good and pure life, whether it is called Hindu, Muslim or Christian.

—*Young India*: Sept. 22, 1921.

13. MISSIONARY WORK

Q. May we know what form, in your opinion, missionary work should take if the missionaries are to stay in India?

A. Yes. They have to alter their attitude. Today, they tell people that there is no salvation for them except through the *Bible* and through Christianity. It is customary to decry other religions and to offer their own as the only one that can bring deliverance. That attitude should be radically changed.[2] Let them appear before the people as they are, and try to rejoice in seeing Hindus become better Hindus and Mussalmans better Mussalmans. Let them start work at the bottom, let them enter into what is best in their life and offer nothing inconsistent with it. That will make their work far more efficacious, and what they will say and offer to the people will be appreciated without suspicion and hostility. In a word, let them go to the people not as patrons, but as one of them, not to oblige them but to serve them and to work among them.

—*Young India*: July 14, 1927.

14. MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE

IT becomes perhaps necessary to re-read the message of the *Bible* in terms of what is happening around us. The word is the same, but the spirit ever broadens intensively and extensively, and it might be that many things in the *Bible* will have to be re-interpreted in the light of discoveries not of modern science, but in the spiritual world in the shape of direct experiences common to all faiths. The fundamental verses of St. John do require to be re-read and re-interpreted.

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[1] "Jesus denounced the wickedness of the Scribes and the Pharisees, but he did not hate them. He did not enunciate this Law of Love for the man and hate for the evil in him for himself only, but he taught the doctrine for universal practice. Indeed, I find it in all scriptures of the world."

—*Young India*: July 13, 1921.

[2] "Progress of liberal study of religions of the world is bound to revolutionize the existing clumsy method of proselytizing which looks to the form rather than the substance. It is the transference of allegiance from one fold to another and the mutual decrying of rival faiths which gives rise to mutual hatred."

—*Young India*: Jan. 6, 1927

I have come to feel that like us, human beings, words have their evolution from stage to stage in the contents they hold. For instance, the contents of the richest word—God—are not the same to every one of us. They will vary with the experience of each. They will mean one thing to the Santhal and another to his next-door neighbour Rabindranath Tagore. The *Sanatanist* may reject my interpretation of God and Hinduism. But God Himself is a long-suffering God who puts up with any amount of abuse and misinterpretations.

Open Your Hearts to Receive

If we were to put the spiritual experiences together, we would find a resultant which would answer the cravings of human nature. Christianity is 1900 years old, Islam is 1300 years old, who knows the possibility of either? I have not read the *Vedas* in the original, but have tried to assimilate their spirit and have not hesitated to say that though the *Vedas* may be 13,000 years old,—or even a million years old, as they well may be, for the word of God is as old as God Himself,—even the *Vedas* must be interpreted in the light of our experience. The powers of God should not be limited by the limitations of our understanding. To you (missionaries) who have come to teach India, I, therefore, say: You cannot give without taking. If you have come to give rich treasures of experiences, open your hearts out to receive the treasures of this land, and you will not be disappointed, neither will you have misread the message of the *Bible*.

Do Not Undermine People's Faith

Q. What then are we doing? Are we doing the right things?

A. You are trying to do the right thing in the wrong way. I want you to complement the faith of the people instead of undermining it. I would similarly say to you, make us better Hindus, *i.e.* better men or women. Why should a man, even if he becomes a Christian, be torn from his surroundings? Whilst a boy, I heard it being said that to become a Christian was to have a brandy bottle in one hand and beef in the other. Things are better now, but it is not unusual to find Christianity synonymous with denationalization and Europeanization. Must we give up our simplicity to become better people? Do not lay the axe at our simplicity.

Let Our Lives Speak

Q. There are not only two issues before us, *viz.* to serve and to teach, there is a third issue, *viz.* evangelizing, declaring the glad tidings of the coming of Jesus and his death in redemption for our sins. What is the right way of giving the good news? We need not undermine the faith, but we may make people lose their faith in lesser things.

A. That lands me into the region of interpretation. Whilst I must not enter into it, I may suggest that God did not bear the Cross only 1900 years ago, but He bears it to-day, and He dies and is resurrected from day to day. It would be poor comfort to the world, if it had to depend upon a historical God who died 2,000 years ago. Do not then preach the God of history, but show Him as He lives to-day through you. In South Africa, I met a number of friends, and read a number of books,—Pearson, Parker and Butler,—all giving their own interpretations, and I said to myself: I must not bother myself with these conflicting interpretations. It is better to allow our lives to speak for us than our words. C. F. Andrews never preaches. He is incessantly doing his work. He finds enough work and stays where he finds it and takes no credit for bearing the Cross. I have the honour to know hundreds of honest Christians, but I have not known one better than Andrews.

Animistic Beliefs

Q. But what about animistic beliefs? Should they not be corrected?

A. Well, we have been working amongst the so-called 'untouchables' and backward classes, and we have never bothered ourselves with their beliefs, animistic or otherwise. Superstition and undesirable things go as soon as we begin to live the correct life. I concern myself not with their belief, but with asking them to do the right thing. As soon as they do it, their belief rights itself.

Simplicity and Humility

Q. You speak of simplicity. But what are we to do in this age of motor-cars? You could not have come here without a motor-car?

A. Well, a motor-car is not a necessity. I certainly did not need it to come here. If God wants you to be useful, He should find the means to make you useful. Motor-cars do not mean the sum of our spiritual experience. There were no motor-cars in Jesus' or Mohammed's time, and yet they did not need them for their work. I do not hold them to be essential for real progress. We need to be humble. And humility and simplicity are not mere outward expressions. When Paul speaks of humility, he means heart-humility. A true Christian has little need to speak. He goes about his Father's business. May I cite my own case? Speeches were the least part of my work in South Africa. Most of the 16,000 people who rose like one man and joined me had not even seen me, much less heard me speak.

Duty of Tolerance

Q. How can we help condemning if we feel that our Christian truth is the only reality?

A. That brings me to the duty of tolerance. If you cannot feel that the other faith is as true as yours, you should feel at least that the men are as true as you. The intolerance of the Christian missionaries does not, I am glad to say, take the ugly shape it used to take some years ago. Think of the caricature of Hinduism, which one finds in so many publications of the Christian Literature Society. A lady wrote to me the other day saying that unless I embraced Christianity, all my work would be nothing worth. And, of course, that Christianity must mean what she understands as such! Well, all I can say is that it is a wrong attitude.

—*Young India*: Aug. 11, 1927.

15. FAITH HAS TO BE LIVED

Q. Believing that Christ was a revelation of God, Christians of America have sent to India thousands of their sons and daughters to tell the people of India about Christ. Will you, in return, kindly give us your interpretation of Hinduism and make a comparison of Hinduism with the teachings of Christ?

A. I have ventured, at several missionary meetings, to tell English and American missionaries that if they could have refrained from 'telling' India about Christ and had merely lived the life enjoined upon them by the *Sermon on the Mount*, India, instead of suspecting them, would have appreciated their living in the midst of her children and directly profited by their presence.[1] Holding this view, I can 'tell' American friends nothing about Hinduism by way of 'return'. I do not believe in people telling others of their faith, especially with a view to conversion. Faith does not admit of telling. It has to be lived and then it becomes self-propagating.

Nor do I consider myself fit to interpret Hinduism except through my own life. And, if I may not interpret Hinduism through my written word, I may not compare it with Christianity.

—*Young India*: Oct. 20, 1927.

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[1] "The history of India would have been written differently if the Christians had come to India to live their lives in our midst and permeate ours with their aroma, if there was any. They would, then, have been mutual goodwill and utter absence of suspicion. But say some of them: 'If what you say had held good with Jesus, there would have been no Christians.' To answer this would land me in a controversy in which I have no desire to engage. But I may be permitted to say that Jesus preached not a new religion, but a new life. He called men to repentance. It was he who said: 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven."

—***Harijan***: June 12, 1937.

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bahtalab Jammu

16. TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Q. What is your attitude towards the teachings of Jesus Christ?

A. They have an immense moral value for me, but I do not regard everything said in the *Bible* as the final word of God or exhaustive or even acceptable from the moral stand-point. I regard Jesus Christ as one of the greatest teachers of mankind, but I do not consider him to be the 'only Son of God.' Many passages in the *Bible* are mystical. For me, 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.'

—*Young India*: Feb. 25, 1926

17. THE PLACE OF JESUS

FOR many, many years I have regarded Jesus of Nazareth as one amongst the mighty teachers that the world has had, and I say this in all humility. I claim humility for this expression for the simple reason that this is exactly what I feel. Of course, Christians claim a higher place for Jesus of Nazareth than as a non-Christian and as a Hindu I have been able to feel. I purposely use the word 'feel' instead of 'give', because I consider that neither I, nor anybody else, can possibly arrogate to himself the claim of giving place to a great man.

Great Teachers of Mankind

The great teachers of mankind have had the places not given to them, but the place has belonged to them as a matter of right, as a matter of service that they have rendered; but it is given to the lowest and humblest amongst us to feel certain things about certain people. The relation between great teachers and ourselves is somewhat after the style of relation between a husband and wife. It would be a most terrible thing, a tragic thing, if I were to argue out intellectually for myself what place I was to give to my wife in my heart. It is not in my giving, but she takes the place that belongs to her as a matter of right in my heart. It is a matter purely for feeling.

Study the Teachings of Jesus

Then, I can say that Jesus occupies in my heart the place of one of the great teachers who have made a considerable influence on my life. Leave the Christians alone for the present. I shall say to the Hindus that your lives will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus. I have come to the conclusion, in my own experience, that those who, no matter to what faith they belong, reverently study the teaching of other faiths, broaden their own instead of narrowing their hearts. Personally, I do not regard any of the great religions of the world as false. All have served in enriching mankind and are now even serving their purpose.

The one thing which occurs to me, which came to me in my early studies of the *Bible*. It seized me immediately I read the passage: "Make this world the Kingdom of God[1] and His righteousness and everything will be added unto you." I tell you that if you will understand, appreciate and act up to the spirit of this passage, you won't even need to know what place Jesus or any other teacher occupies in your heart. If you will do the proper scavenger's work, clean and purify your hearts and get them ready, you will find that all these mighty teachers will take their places without invitation from us.

—*With Gandhiji in Ceylon*: P. 143

18. THE MESSAGE OF JESUS

THE message of Jesus, as I understand it, is contained in his *Sermon on the Mount* unadulterated and taken as a whole; and, even in connection with the *Sermon on the Mount*, my own humble interpretation of the message is in many respects different from the orthodox. The message, to my mind, has suffered distortion in the West. It may be presumptuous for me to say so, but as a devotee of Truth, I should not hesitate to say what I feel. I know that the world is not waiting to know my opinion on Christianity.

Negation of The Sermon on The Mount

One's own religion is after all a matter between oneself and one's Maker and no one else's, but if I feel impelled to share my thoughts with you, it is because I want to enlist your sympathy in my search for Truth and because so many Christian friends are interested in my thoughts on the teachings of Jesus. If, then, I had to face only the *Sermon on the Mount* and my own interpretation of it, I should not hesitate to say: 'Oh yes, I am a Christian.' But I know that, at the present moment, if I said any such thing, I would lay myself open to the gravest misinterpretation. I should lay myself open to fraudulent claims, because I would have then to tell you what my own meaning of Christianity is, and I have no desire myself to give you my own view of Christianity. But, negatively, I can tell you that, in my humble opinion, much of what passes as Christianity is a negation of the *Sermon on the Mount*.

Conduct Falls Far Short of Belief

And please mark my words. I am not at the present moment speaking of Christian conduct. I am speaking of the Christian belief, of Christianity as it is understood in the West. I am painfully aware of the fact that conduct everywhere falls far short of belief. But I don't say this by way of criticism. I know from the treasures of my own experience that, although I am every moment of my life trying to live up to my professions, my conduct falls short of these professions. Far, therefore, be it from me to say this in a spirit of criticism. But I am placing before you my fundamental difficulties. When I began as a prayerful student to study the Christian literature in South Africa in 1893, I asked myself: 'Is this Christianity,?' and have always got the *Vedic* answer, *'Neti', 'Neti'* (not this, not this). And the deepest in me tells me that I am right.

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[1] "My experience tells me that the Kingdom of God is within us, and that we can realize it not by saying, 'Lord, Lord,' but by doing His will and His work. If, therefore, we wait for the Kingdom to come as something coming from outside, we shall be sadly mistaken."

—*Young India*: March 31, 1927.

Let Our Lives be Open Books

I claim to be a man of faith and prayer, and even if I was cut to pieces, God would give me the strength not to deny Him and to assert that He is. The Muslim says: He is and there is no one else. The Christian says the same thing and so the Hindu ; and, if I may say so, even the Buddhist says the same thing, if in different words. We may, each of us, be putting our own interpretation on the word 'God,'—God who embraces not only this tiny globe of ours, but millions and billions of such globes. How can we, little crawling creatures, so utterly helpless as He has made us, how can we possibly measure His greatness, His boundless love, His infinite compassion, such that He allows man insolently to deny Him, wrangle about Him, and cut the throat of his fellowmen? How can we measure the greatness of God who is so forgiving, so divine? Thus, though we may utter the same words, they have not the same meaning for us all. And hence I say that we do not need to proselytize or do *Shuddhi* or *Tabligh* through our speeach or writing. We can only do it really with our lives. Let them be open books for all to study. Would that I could persuade the missionary friends to take this view of their mission. Then, there will be no distrust, no suspicion, no jealousy and no dissensions.

Jesus' Teaching and Modern Civilization

Confuse not Jesus' teaching with what passes as modern civilization, and pray do not do unconscious violence to the people among whom you cast your lot. It is not part of that call, I assure you, to tear the lives of the people of the East by its roots. Tolerate whatever is good in them and do not hastily, with your preconceived notions, judge them. Do not judge lest you be judged yourselves. In spite of your belief in the greatness of Western civilization and in spite of your pride in all your achievements, I plead with you for humility, and ask you to leave some little room for doubt, in which, as Tennyson sang, there was more truth, though by 'doubt' he no doubt meant a different thing. Let us each one live our life, and if ours is the right life, where is the cause for hurry? It will react of itself.

—*Young India*: Dec. 8, 1927.

19. DESTRUCTIVE SHOW OF MAMMON

DON'T be dazzled by the splendour that comes to you from the West. Do not be thrown off your feet by this passing show. The Enlightened One[1] has told you in never-to-be forgotten words that this little span of life is but a passing shadow, a fleeting thing, and if you realize the nothingness of all that appears before your eyes, the nothingness of this material case that we see before us ever changing, then, indeed, there are treasures for you up above, and there is peace for you down here, peace which passeth all understanding, and happiness to which we are utter strangers. It requires an amazing faith, a divine faith and surrender of all that we see before us. What did Buddha do and Christ do, and also Mohammed? Theirs were lives of self-sacrifice and renunciation. Buddha renounced every worldly happiness, because he wanted to share with the whole world his happiness which was to be had by men who sacrificed and suffered in search for Truth.

Be Not Lifted off Your Feet

If it was a good thing to scale the heights of Mt. Everest, sacrificing precious lives in order to be able to go there and make some slight observations, if it was a glorious thing to give up life after life in planting a flag in the uttermost extremities of the earth, how much more glorious would it be to give not one life, surrender not a million lives but a billion lives in search of the potent and imperishable Truth? So, be not lifted off your feet, do not be drawn away from the simplicity of your ancestors. A time is coming when those, who are in the mad rush to-day of multiplying their wants, vainly thinking that they add to the real substance, real knowledge of the world, will retrace their steps and say: 'What have we done?' Civilizations have come and gone and, in spite of all our vaunted progress, I am tempted to ask again and again: 'To what purpose?' Wallace, a contemporary of Darwin, has said the same thing. Fifty years of brilliant inventions and discoveries, he has said, has not added one inch to the moral height of mankind. So said a dreamer and visionary, if you will,—Tolstoy. So said Jesus, and Buddha, and Mohammed, whose religion is being denied and falsified in my own country to-day.

You Cannot Serve both God and Mammon

By all means drink deep of the fountains that are given to you in the *Sermon on the Mount*, but then you will have to take sackcloth and ashes. The teaching of the *Sermon* was meant for each and every one of us. You cannot serve both God and Mammon. God—the Compassionate and the Merciful, Tolerance—incarnate,—allows Mammon to have his nine days' wonder. But I say to you: Fly from that self-destroying but destructive show of Mammon.

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[1] Lord Buddha.

—*Young India*: Dec. 8, 1927.

20. FORGIVENESS ON SIN

ASKING for forgiveness means that we should not sin again, and the grant of forgiveness means that we would have power to resist all temptation. It is only after a persistent, untiring effort that God comes to our rescue as a wall of protection, and there is a growing consciousness that we shall not sin. In a famous controversy with Huxley, I remember Gladstone having said that when the definite grace of God was pledged to us, we became incapable of sin. Jesus was incapable of sin from birth, Gladstone said, but we could be such by constant striving. So long as there is a single evil thought coming to our mind, we must conclude that there is not complete forgiveness or grace.[1]

—*Young India*: Dec. 22, 1927.

21. PLEA FOR TOLERATION

INSPITE of my being a staunch Hindu, I find room in my faith for Christian and Islamic and Zoroastrian teaching, and, therefore, my Hinduism *seems* to some to be a conglomeration and some have even dubbed me an eclectic. Well, to call a man eclectic is to say that he has no faith, but mine is a broad faith which does not oppose Christians,—not even a Plymouth Brother—, not even the most fanatical Mussalman. It is a faith based on the broadest possible toleration. I refuse to abuse a man for his fanatical deeds. because I try to see them from his point of view. It is that broad faith that sustains me. It is a somewhat embarrassing position, I know,—but to others. not to me.

I should love all the men,—not only in India but in the world,—belonging to the different faiths, to become better people by contact with one another, and if that happens the world will be a much better place to live in than it is to-day. I plead for the broadest toleration, and I am working to that end. I ask people to examine every religion from the point of the religionists themselves. I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, *i.e.*, to be wholly Hindu or wholly Christian, or wholly Mussalman; but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another.

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[1] Asked what he thought of the possibility of the forgiveness of sin, Gandhiji explained at length how there could be no forgiveness like the forgiveness that a criminal prays for and gets from an earthly king. It was a question of a change of heart brought about by true contrition, a ceaseless striving for purification. In this connection, Gandhiji referred to the case of the Plymouth Brother whom he has himself made historic by a detailed reference in the *Autobiography*. "But the Plymouth Brother I met," said Gandhiji, "argued that there was no such thing as human effort. If you accept the fact of Crucifixion, sinfulness would go altogether. I was astounded as I knew and was intimate with quite a number of Christian friends who were making a definite effort. 'Don't you fall?' I asked him. 'Yes,' he said, 'but my strength comes from the fact that Jesus intercedes for me and washes my sins away.' Well, I tell you the Quaker friend, who had introduced me to the Plymouth Brother, felt no less astounded."

—*Young India*: Dec. 22, 1927.

—*Young India*: Dec. 22, 1927.

22. THE SERMON AND THE GITA

I HAVE not been able to see any difference between the *Sermon on the Mount* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. What the *Sermon* describes in a graphic manner, the *Bhagavad Gita* reduces to a scientific formula. It may not be a scientific book in the accepted sense of the term, but it has argued out the Law of Love—the Law of Abandon as I would call it—in a scientific manner. The *Sermon on the Mount* gives the same law in wonderful language. The *New Testament* gave me comfort and boundless joy,[1] as it came after the repulsion that parts of the *Old* had given me. To-day, supposing I was deprived of the *Gita* and forgot all its contents but had a copy of the *Sermon*, I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the *Gita*.

There is one thing in me, and that is that I love to see the bright side of things and not the seamy side, and so I can derive comfort and inspiration from any great book of any great religion. I may not be able to reproduce a single verse from the *Gita* or the *New Testament*, a Hindu child or Christian child may be able to repeat the verses better, but those clever children cannot deprive me of the assimilation that is in me to-day of the spirit of the two books.

—*Young India*: Dec. 22, 1927.

23. INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

IN order to attain a perfect fellowship, every act of its members must be a religious act and an act of sacrifice. I came to the conclusion long ago, after prayerful search and study and discussion with as many people as I could meet, that all religions were true and, also, that all had some error in them; and that whilst I hold by my own, I should hold others as dear as Hinduism; from which it logically follows that we should hold all as dear as our nearest kith and kin and that we should make no distinction between them. So, we can only pray, if we are Hindus, not that a Christian should become a Hindu; or if we are Mussalmans, not that a Hindu or a Christian should become a Mussalman; nor should we even secretly pray that anyone should be converted; but our inmost prayer should be that a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Christian a better Christian. That is the fundamental truth of fellowship.

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[1] "There have been many times when I did not know which way to turn. But I have gone to the *Bible*, and particularly the *New Testament*, and have drawn strength from its message."

—*Young India*: Feb. 25, 1920.

Foundation of Fellowship

If, however, there is any suspicion in your minds that only one religion can be true and others false, you must reject the doctrine of fellowship. Then, we would have a continuous process of exclusion and found our fellowship on an exclusive basis. Above all, I plead for utter truthfulness. If we do not feel for other religions as we feel for our own, we had better disband ourselves, for we do not want a wishy-washy toleration. My doctrine of toleration does not include toleration of evil, though it does the toleration of the evil-minded. It does not, therefore, mean that you have to invite each and every one who is evil-minded or tolerate a false faith. By a true faith I mean one the sum total of whose energy is for the good of its adherents; by a false I mean that which is predominantly false. If you, therefore, feel that the sum total of Hinduism has been bad for the Hindus and the world, you must reject it as a false faith.

I would not only not try to convert, but would not even secretly pray that anyone should embrace my faith. My prayer would always be that Imamsaheb should be a better Mussalman, or become the best he can.[1] Hinduism with its message of *Ahimsa* is to me the most glorious religion in the world—as my wife to me is the most beautiful woman in the world—but others may feel the same about their own religion. Cases of real honest conversion are quite possible. If some people, for their inward satisfaction and growth, change their religion, let them do so.

Q. Would you have a ruling of such a character that those who have a desire to convert should not be eligible for membership?

A. Personally, I think they should not be eligible. I regard it as the logical outcome of fellowship. It is essential for inter-religious relationship and contact.

Q. Is not the impulse to proselytize God-given?

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[1] "The aim of the Fellowship (of Faiths) should be to help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Mussalman to become a better Mussalman, and a Christian a better Christian. The attitude of patronizing toleration is false to the spirit of International Fellowship. If I have a suspicion in my mind that my religion is more or less true, and that other's are more or less false instead of being more or less true, then, though I may have some sort of fellowship with them, it is of an entirely different kind from the one we need in the International Fellowship.

"Our prayer for others must be NOT 'God, give him the light that Thou hast given me,' BUT 'give him all the light and truth he needs for his highest development.' Pray merely that your friends may become better men, whatever their form of religion. Nevertheless, your experience may become a part of their experience, without your knowing it."
—*Sabarmati*: 1928: P. 17-19.

A. I question it. But if all impulses are God-given as some of our Hindus believe, He has also given us discrimination. He will say: I have given you many impulses so that your capacity to face temptation may be tested.

Q. But you do believe in preaching an economic order?

A. I do, as I believe in preaching laws of health.

Q. Then, why not apply the same rule in religious matters?

A. It is a relevant question. But you must not forget that we have started with the fundamental principle that all religions are true. If there were different but good and true health laws for different communities, I should hesitate to preach some as true and some as false. I am positive that with people not prepared to tolerate one another's religious belief, there can be no international fellowship.

Analogy of a Rose

Moreover, physical analogies, when applied to spiritual matters, are good only up to a certain point. When you take up an analogy from Nature, you can stretch it only to a certain point. But I would take an illustration from the physical world and explain what I mean. If I want to hand a rose to you, there is a definite movement. But if I want to transmit its scent, I do so without any movement. The rose transmits its own scent without a movement. Let us rise a step higher, and we can understand that spiritual experiences are self-acting. Therefore, the analogy of preaching sanitation etc. does not hold good. If we have spiritual truth, it will transmit itself. You talk of the joy of a spiritual experience and say you cannot but share it. Well, if it is real joy, boundless joy, it will spread itself without the vehicle of speech. In spiritual matters, we have merely to step out of the way. Let God work His way. If we interfere, we may do harm. Good is a self-acting force. Evil is not, because it is a negative force. It requires the cloak of virtue before it can march forward.

Christ's Teaching

Q. Did not Jesus Himself teach and preach?

A. We are on dangerous ground here. You ask me to give my interpretation of the life of Christ. Well, I may say that I do not accept everything in the Gospels as historical truth. And it must be remembered that he was working amongst his own people, and he said he had not come to destroy but to fulfil. I draw a great distinction between the *Sermon on the Mount* and the *Letters of Paul*. They are a graft on Christ's teaching, his own gloss apart from Christ's own experience.

—*Young India*: Jan. 19, 1928.

THINGS OF THE SPIRIT

Q. I am very much attracted by your illustration of the smell of a rose. We will all admit that the real proof of the truth of a religion is the fragrance of real spirituality, love, joy, peace, that may emanate from those that hold to that religion. And without that our creeds and professions and preachings of it, even our worship and prayers, will not lead anyone to see that we have "a secret of the Lord" with us. But does it follow from this that we cannot impart a share of what we rejoice in to others in any other way than as the smell of a rose imparts itself?

A. Let me extend the analogy of fragrance, faulty as all analogies are in their very nature. The rose imparts its fragrance not in many ways but only one. Those who have not the sense of smell will miss it. You cannot feel the fragrance through the tongue or the ear or the skin. So may you not receive spirituality except through the spiritual sense. Hence have all religions recognized the necessity of that sense being awakened. It is a second birth. A man with intense spirituality may, without speech or a gesture, touch the hearts of millions who have never seen him and whom he has never seen. The most eloquent preacher, if he has not spirituality in him, will fail to touch the hearts of his audience. Therefore, I venture to think that most of the effort of modern missions is not only useless but more often than not harmful.

Lack of Real Humility

At the root of missionary effort is also the assumption that one's own belief is true, not only for oneself but for all the world; whereas the truth is that God reaches us through millions of ways not understood by us. In missionary effort, therefore, there is lack of real humility that instinctively recognizes human limitations and the limitless powers of God. I have no feeling that, from a spiritual standpoint, I am necessarily superior to the so-called savage. And spiritual superiority is a dangerous thing to feel. It is not like many other things which we can perceive, analyze and prove through our senses. If it is there, I cannot be deprived of it by any power on earth, and it will have its effect in its own due time. But if, in matters of medicine and other natural sciences, I feel my superiority over others, a thing of which I may be legitimately conscious and if I have love for my fellow-beings, I would naturally share my knowledge with them. But things of the spirit I leave to God and thus keep the bond between fellow-beings and myself pure, correct and within limits. But I must not carry this argument any further.

—*Young India*: March 22, 1928.

25. CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANITY

Q. What is the contribution of Christianity to the national life of India? I mean the influence of Christ as apart from Christianity, for, I am afraid, there is a wide gulf separating the two at present.

A. Aye, there lies the rub. It is not possible to consider the teaching of a religious teacher apart from the lives of his followers. Unfortunately, Christianity in India has been inextricably mixed up for the last one hundred and fifty years with the British rule. It appears to us as synonymous with materialistic civilization and imperialistic exploitation by the stronger white races of the weaker races of the world.[1] Its contribution to India has been, therefore, largely of a negative character.

—*Young India*: March 21, 1929.

26. TRUTH IS SELF-PROPELLING

Dr. Mott: Do you disbelieve in all conversion?

Gandhiji: I disbelieve in the conversion of one person by another. My effort should never be to undermine another's faith, but to make him a better follower of his own faith. This implies belief in the truth of all religions and, therefore, respect for them. It again implies true humility, a recognition of the fact that the Divine Light having been vouchsafed to all religions through an imperfect medium of flesh, they must share, in more or less degree, the imperfection of the vehicle.[2]

Dr. Mott: Is it not our duty to help our fellow-beings to the maximum of truth that we many possess, to share with them our deepest spiritual experiences?

Gandhiji: I am sorry I must again differ from you, for the simple reason that the deepest spiritual truths are always unutterable. That Light, to which you refer, transcends speech. It can be felt only through the inner experience. And then the highest truth needs no communicating, for it is by its very nature self-propelling. It radiates its influence silently as the rose its fragrance without the intervention of a medium.

Prophets Speak through their Lives

Dr. Mott: But even God sometimes speaks through His prophets.

Gandhiji: Yes, but the prophets speak not through the tongue, but through their lives. I have, however, known that in this matter I am up against a solid wall of Christian opinion.

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[1] "Christianity is no Christianity in which a vast number of Christians believe in governments based on brute force and are denying Christ every day of their lives."

—*Young India*: Oct. 27, 1927.

[2] "My Hindu instinct tells me that all religions are, more or less, true. All proceed from the same God but all are imperfect, because they have come down to us through imperfect human instrumentality."

—*Young India*: May 29, 1924.

Dr. Mott: Oh, no. Even among Christians there is a school of thought [illegible] growing which holds that the authoritarian method should not be employed, but that each individual should be left to discover the deepest truths of life for himself. The argument advanced is that the process of spiritual discovery is bound to vary in the case of different individuals according to their varying needs and temperaments. In other words, they feel that propaganda, in the accepted sense of the term, is not the most effective method.

Gandhiji: I am glad to hear you say this. That is what Hinduism certainly inculcates.

—*Young India*: March 21, 1929.

27. CONVERSIONS

I AM against conversion whether it is known as *Shuddhi* by Hindus, *Tabligh* by Mussalmans or proselytizing by Christians. Conversion is a heart-process, known only to and by God. It must be left to itself. Those who believe in it have a perfect right to follow their own course without let or hindrance, so long as it is kept within proper limits, *i.e.* so long as there is no force nor fraud nor material inducement, and so long as the parties are free agents and of mature age and understanding.

—*Young India*: Jan. 6, 1927.

After much prayerful study of the Hindu *Shastras*, I have come to the conclusion that there is no room in them for conversions such as they have in Islam and Christianity. I am also certain, on a prayerful reading of the *Quran*, that there is no warrant for the *Tabligh* that is being promoted to-day.[1] It is possible that I may be mistaken. Let God correct me in that case. I, for myself, would love to protect my religion with *tapashcharya*—the way of prayerful suffering—which is the royal road to success in any noble object. I must be free to read the *Gita* or the *Quran* of my own accord. Why should a Hindu compel me to read the one, or a Mussalman to read the other? Why should I need a Christian to compel me to read the *Bible?* No one may stand between a man and his religion or God. He who has no inkling of religion, whose heart is arid and unpurified —how dare he purify (by proselytizing) others?

—*Young India*: Jan. 27, 1927.

28. 'PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF!'

I HOLD that proselytizing under the cloak of humanitarian work is, to say the least, unhealthy. It is most certainly resented by the people here. Religion, after all, is a deeply personal matter, it touches the heart.[2] Why should I change my religion because a doctor who professes Christianity as his religion has cured me of some disease, or why should the doctor expect or suggest such a change whilst I am under his influence? Is not medical relief its own reward and satisfaction? Or why should I, whilst I am in a missionary educational institution, have Christian teaching thrust upon me? In my opinion, these practices are not uplifting and give rise to suspicion if not even secret hostility. The methods of conversion must be like Cæsar's wife above suspicion. Faith is not imparted like secular subjects. It is given through the language of the heart. If a man has a living faith in him, it spreads its aroma like the rose its scent. Because of its invisibility, the extent of its influence is far wider than that of the visible beauty of the colour of the petals.

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[1] "In my opinion, there is no sanction in Hinduism, Islam or Christianity for the *Shuddhi, Tabligh* or proselytizing (respectively as it is going on to-day)."

- -*Young India*: March 3, 1927.

[2] "It is idle to talk of winning souls for God. Is God so helpless that He cannot win souls for Himself? Everyone's religion is a personal matter with himself. I cannot preach Hinduism, I can but practise it."

—*Harijan*: May 25, 1925.

I am, then, not against conversion. But I am against the modern methods of it. Conversion now-a-days has become a matter of business, like any other. I remember having read a missionary report saying how much it cost per head to convert and then presenting a budget for 'the next harvest'.

No Faith is Perfect

I maintain that India's great faiths are all-sufficing for her. Apart from Christianity and Judaism, Hinduism and its off-shoots, Islam and Zoroastrianism are living faiths. No one faith is perfect. All faiths are equally dear to their respective votaries. What is wanted, therefore, is living friendly contact among the followers of the great religions of the world, and not a clash among them in the fruitless attempt on the part of each community to show the superiority of its faith over the rest. Through such friendly contact, it will be possible for us all to rid our respective faiths of shortcomings and excrescences.

It follows from what I have said above that India is in no need of conversion of the kind I have in mind. Conversion, in the sense of self-purification, self-realization, is the crying need of the times. That, however, is not what is ever meant by proselytizing. To those who would convert India, might it not be said:

'Physician, heal thyself'?[1]

—*Young India*: April 23, 1931.

29. AROMA OF CHRISTIANITY

Q. Has India benefited by Christianity?

A. Indirectly. The contacts of some of the noblest Christians could not but benefit us. We studied their lives, we came in contact with them, and they naturally ennobled us. But, as regards missionary activities as such, I cannot but use the language of caution. The very least I would say is that I doubt if they have benefited India.

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[1] "'Physician, heal thyself!' is more true in matters religious than mundane."

—*Young India*: May 29, 1924.

The most I could say is that they have repelled India from Christianity and placed a barrier between Christian life and Hindu or Mussalman life. When I go to your Scriptures I do not see the barrier raised, but when I see a missionary I find that barrier rising up before my eyes. I want you to accept this testimony from one who was for a time susceptible to those influences. The missionaries working in colleges and hospitals, too, have served us with the mental reservation that through the hospital and the college they want people to come to Christ. I have a definite feeling that if you want us to feel the aroma of Christianity, you must copy the rose. The rose irresistibly draws people to itself, and the scent remains with them. Even so, the aroma of Christianity is subtler even than that of the roso and should, therefore, be imparted in an even quieter and more imperceptible manner, if possible. —*Young India*: Oct. 15, 1931.

30. THE HOUSE OF GOD

Q. Why do you refuse to enter God's House, if Jesus invites you? Why does not India take up the Cross?

A. If Jesus has reference to God, I have never refused to enter the House of God; indeed, every moment I am trying to enter it. If Jesus represents not a person, but the principle of non-violence, India has accepted its protecting power. —*Young India*: Dec. 31, 1931.

31. A MESSAGE FOR AMERICA

I HAVE never been able to reconcile myself to the gaieties of the Christmas season. They have appeared to me to be so inconsistent with the life and teaching of Jesus.

How I wish America could lead the way by devoting the season to a real moral stock-taking and emphasizing consecration to the service of mankind for which Jesus lived and died on the Cross!

—*Young India*: Dec. 31, 1931.

32. THE JESUS I LOVE

I SHALL tell you how, to an outsider like me, the story of Christ, as told in the *New Testament*, has struck. My acquaintance with the *Bible* began nearly forty-five years ago, and that was through the *New Testament*. I could not then take much interest in the *Old Testament*, which I had certainly read, if only to fulfil a promise I had made to a friend whom I happened to meet in a hotel. But when I came to the *New Testament* and the *Sermon on the Mount*, I began to understand the Christian teaching, and the teaching of the *Sermon on the Mount* echoed something I had learnt in childhood and something which seemed to be part of my being and which I felt was being acted up to in the daily life around me.

I say it seemed to be acted up to, meaning thereby that it was not necessary for my purpose that they were actually living the life.

This teaching was non-retaliation, or non-resistance to evil. Of all the things I read, what remained with me for ever was that Jesus came almost to give a new law—though he, of course, had said he had not come to give a new law, but tack something on to the old Mosaic law. Well, he changed it so that it became a new law—not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but to be ready to receive two blows when one was given, and to go two miles when you were asked to go one.

The Sermon on The Mount

I said to myself: "This is what one learns in one's childhood. Surely, this is not Christianity. For, all I had then been given to understand was that to be a Christian was to have a brandy bottle in one hand and beef in the other. The *Sermon on the Mount*, however, falsified the impression.

As my contact with real Christians, *i.e.*, men living in fear of God, increased, I saw that the *Sermon on the Mount* was the whole Christianity for him who wanted to live a Christian life. It is that *Sermon* which has endeared Jesus to me.

I may say that I have never been interested in a historical Jesus. I should not care if it was proved by someone that the man called Jesus never lived, and that what was narrated in the Gospels was a figment of the writer's imagination. For, the *Sermon on the Mount* would still be true for me.

Christianity Has Yet to be Lived

Reading, therefore, the whole story in that light, it seems to me that Christianity has yet to be lived, unless one says that where there is boundless love and no idea of retaliation whatsoever, it is Christianity that lives. But, then, it surmounts all boundaries and book-teaching. Then, it is something indefinable, not capable of being preached to men, not capable of being transmitted from mouth to mouth, but from heart to heart. But Christianity is not commonly understood in that way.

Somehow, in God's providence, the *Bible* has been preserved from destruction by the Christians so-called. The British and Foreign Bible Society has had it translated into many languages. All that may serve a real purpose in the time to come. Two thousand years in the life of a living Faith may be nothing. For, though we sing: "All glory to God on High and on the earth be peace," there seems to be to-day neither glory to God nor peace on earth.

When Christ is Born

As long as it remains a hunger still unsatisfied, as long as Christ is not yet born, we have to look forward to him. When real peace is established we will not need declarations, but it will be echoed in our life, not only in individual life but in corporate life. Then, we shall say Christ is born. Then, we will not think of a particular day in the year as that of the birth of Christ, but as an ever-recurring event which can be enacted in every life.

And the more I think of fundamental religion, and the more I think of miraculous conceptions of so many teachers who have come down from age to age and clime to clime, the more I see that there is behind them the eternal truth that I have narrated. That needs no label or declaration. It consists in the living of life, never ceasing, ever progressing towards peace.

Living Christ means A Living Cross

When, therefore, one wishes "A Happy Christmas" without the meaning behind it, it becomes nothing more than an empty formula. And unless one wishes for peace for all life, one cannot wish for peace for oneself. It is a well-evident axiom like the Axioms of Euclid, that one cannot have peace unless there is in one an intense longing for peace all round. You may certainly experience peace in the midst of strife, but that happens only when to remove strife you destroy your whole life, you crucify yourself.

And so, as the miraculous birth is an eternal event, so is the Cross an eternal event in this stormy life. Therefore, we dare not think of birth without death on the Cross. Living Christ means a living Cross, without it life is a living death.

—*Young India* : Dec. 31, 1931.

33. IMAGE OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED

CHANCE threw Rome in my way. And I was able to see something of that great and ancient city and Mussolini, the unquestioned dictator of Italy. And what would not I have given to be able to bow my head before the living image at the Vatican of Christ Crucified.[1] It was not without a wrench that I could tear myself away from that scene of living tragedy. I saw there at once that nations, like individuals, could only be made through the agony of the Cross and in no other way. Joy comes not out of affliction of pain on others, but out of pain voluntarily borne by oneself.[2]

—*Young India* : Dec. 31, 1931.

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[1] "The image of Jesus Christ which I saw in the Vatican at Rome is before my eyes at all times. The body was covered only by a small piece of cloth such as is worn by poor men in our villages. And what a wonderful look of compassion he had!"

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai* : P. 82.

[2] "There is nowhere, in the little world I have seen, anything to compare with the wonderful frescoes in the Sistine Chapel or the marvellous sculpture in the Vatican. Apart from the incomparable Michael Angelo's paintings in the Chapel, there is a statue of Jesus on the Cross which is capable of moving the stoniest heart. Gandhiji stood before it for several minutes, went near it, went in the rear of it, performed so to say a *pradakshina* of it and said: 'One can't help being moved to tears.'—M.D."

—*Young India* : Jan. 14, 1932

34. PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

Q. What is the most effective way of preaching the Gospel of Christ?

A. To live the Gospel is the most effective way—most effective in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. Preaching jars on me and makes no appeal to me, and I get suspicious of missionaries who preach. But I love those who never preach, but live the life according to their lights. Their lives are silent, yet most effective, testimonies. Therefore, I cannot say what to preach, but I can say that a life of service and uttermost simplicity is the best preaching. If, therefore you go on serving people and ask them also to serve, they would understand. But you quote instead John 3 : 16 and ask them to believe it. That has no appeal to me, and I am sure people will not understand it. Where there has been acceptance of the Gospel through preaching, my complaint is that there has been some motive.

A Rose Does Not Need to Preach

Q. But we also see it, and we try our best to guard against it.

A. But you can't guard against it. One sordid motive vitiates the whole preaching. It is like a drop of poison which fouls the whole food. Therefore, I should do without any preaching at all. A rose does not need to preach. It simply spreads its fragrance. The fragrance is its own sermon. If it had human understanding and if it could engage a number of preachers, the preachers would not be able to sell more roses than the fragrance itself could do. The fragrance of religious and spiritual life is much finer and subtler than that of the rose.

Q. But we, Christians, feel that we, who have something to share, must share it with others. If we want consolation, we find it from the *Bible*. Now, as the Harijans, who have no solace to get from Hinduism, how are we to meet their spiritual needs?

A. By behaving just like the rose. Does the rose proclaim itself, or is self-propagated? Has it an army of missionaries proclaiming its beauties?

Q. But supposing someone asked us: 'Where did you get the scent?'

A. The rose, if it had sense and speech, would say: 'Fool, don't you see that I got it from my Maker?'

Q. But if someone asks you: 'Then is there no book?'

A. You will then say: 'Yes, for me there is the *Bible*.' If they were to ask me, I would present to some the *Quran*, to some the *Gita*, to some the *Bible* and to some Tulsidas' *Ramayana*. I am like a wise doctor prescribing what is necessary for each patient.

Q. But I find difficulty in getting much from the *Gita*.

A. You may, but I do not find any difficulty in getting much from the *Bible* as well as from the *Quran*. —*Harijan*: March 29, 1935.

35. WITH AN INDIAN MISSIONARY

Q. Have I not a moral right to speak?

A. It is not a moral right, but a legal right. There is no right but is legal. Divorced from legality, a moral right is a misnomer. And, therefore, you either enforce a right or fight for it. Whereas nobody asserts one's duty. He humbly performs it. I shall take an illustration. You are here. You feel like preaching to me the Gospel. I deny the right and ask you to go away. If you regard praying for me a duty, you will quietly go away and pray for me. But if you claim the right to preach to me, you will call the police and appeal to them for preventing my obstructing you. That leads to a clash. But your duty no one dare question. You perform it here or elsewhere, and if your prayers to God to change my heart are genuine, God will change my heart. What Christianity, according to my interpretation of it, expects you to do is to pray to God to change my heart. Duty is a debt. Right belongs to a creditor, and it would be a funny thing indeed if a devout Christian claimed to be a creditor!

Spread Your Perfume

Q. We do not preach any theology. We simply talk of the life of Christ and what a comfort His life and teaching have been to us. He has been our guide, we say, and ask others also to accept Him as their guide.

A. Oh yes, you do say that. But when you say I must accept Jesus in preference to Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, you will have to go into deep waters. That is why I say let your life speak to us, even as the rose needs no speech but simply spreads its perfume. Even the blind who do not see the rose perceive its fragrance. That is the secret of the gospel of the rose. But the gospel that Jesus preached is more subtle and fragrant than the gospel of the rose. If the rose needs no agent, much less does the gospel of Christ need any agent.

Let us think of the bulk of your people who preach the Gospel. Do they spread the perfume of their lives? That is to me the sole criterion. All I want them to do is to live Christian lives, not to annotate them. I have come to this view after laborious and prayerful search, and I am glad to say that there is a growing body of Christians who accept my view.

Personality of Jesus

Q. Then, I should be obliged to hear from you your attitude to the personality of Jesus.

A. I have often made it clear. I regard Jesus as a great teacher of humanity, but I do not regard him as the only begotten son of God. That epithet in its material interpretation is quite unacceptable. Metaphorically, we are all begotten sons of God; but for each of us there may be different begotten sons of God in a special sense. Thus, for me, Chaitanya may be the only begotten son of God.

Q. But don't you believe in the *perfection* of human nature, and don't you believe that Jesus had attained perfection?

A. I believe in the *perfectibility* of human nature. Jesus came as near to perfection as possible. To say that he was perfect is to deny God's superiority to man. And, then, in this matter, I have a theory of my own. Being necessarily limited by the bonds of flesh, we can attain perfection only after dissolution of the body. Therefore, God alone is absolutely perfect. When He descends to earth, He of His own accord limits Himself. Jesus died on the Cross because he was limited by the flesh. I do not need either the prophecies or the miracles to establish Jesus' greatness as a teacher. Nothing can be more miraculous than the three years of his ministry. There is no miracle in the story of the multitude being fed on a handful of loaves. A magician can create that illusion. But woe worth the day on which a magician would be hailed as the Saviour of humanity. As for Jesus raising the dead to life, well, I doubt if the men he raised were really dead. I raised a relative's child from supposed death to life, but that was because the child was not dead, and, but for my presence there, she might have been cremated. But I saw that life was not extinct. I gave her an enema and she was restored to life. There was no miracle about it. I do not deny that Jesus had certain psychic powers and he was undoubtedly filled with the love of humanity. But he brought to life not people who were dead, but who were believed to be dead. The laws of Nature are changeless, unchangeable, and there are no miracles in the sense of infringement or interruption of Nature's laws. But we limited beings fancy all kinds of things and impute our limitations to God. We may copy God, but not He us. We may not divide Time for Him. Time for Him is eternity. For us there is past present and future. And what is human life of a hundred years but less than a mere speck in the eternity of time?

—*Harijan* : April 17, 1937.

36. LESS OF THEOLOGY—MORE OF TRUTH

Q. What started you on your career of leadership?

A. It came to me, unsought, unasked. I do not know, though, what sort of leader I am, and whether what I am doing is leadership or service. But whatever it is, it came to me unasked.

All I can say is that there should be less of theology and more of truth in all that you say and do.

Q. Will you kindly explain it?

A. How can I explain the obvious? Amongst agents of the many untruths that are propounded in the world, one of the foremost is theology. I do not say that there is no demand for it. There is a demand in the world for many a questionable thing. But even those, who have to do with theology as part of their work, have to survive their theology. I have two good Christian friends who gave up theology and decided to live the Gospel of Christ.

Q. Are you sure that no great result has come through your own study of Jesus?

A. Why? There is no doubt that it has come, but not, let me tell you, through theology or through the ordinary interpretation of theologists. For, many of them contend that the *Sermon on the Mount* does not apply to mundane things, and that it was only meant for the twelve disciples. Well, I do not believe this. I think the *Sermon on the Mount* has no meaning if it is not of vital use in everyday life to everyone.

Q. Is there not to be found a solution of the present-day problems in the teaching of Jesus?

A. Well, you are now dragging me in deeper waters, and you will drown me.

The Gospel of Christ

Q. Could you tell me the things one should avoid in order to present the Gospel of Christ?

A. Cease to think that you want to convert the whole world to your interpretation of Christianity. At the end of reading the *Bible,* let me tell you, it did not leave on my mind the impression that Jesus ever meant Christians to do what the bulk of those who take his name do. The moment you adopt the attitude I suggest, the field of service becomes limitless. You limit your own capacity by thinking and saying that you must proselytize.

Guided Life

Q. You are living a guided life. Could you kindly tell me your experience of guidance?

A. I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Because God is an Idea, Law Himself, therefore, it is impossible to conceive God as breaking the Law. He, therefore, does not rule our actions and withdraw Himself. When we say He rules our actions, we are simply using human language and we try to limit Him. Otherwise, He and His Law abide everywhere and govern everything. Therefore, I do not think that He answers in every detail every request of ours, but there is no doubt that He rules our actions, and I literally believe that not a blade of grass grows or moves without His will. The free will we enjoy is less than that of a passenger on a crowded deck.

Q. Do you feel a sense of freedom in your communion with God?

A. I do. I do not feel cramped as I would on a boat full of passengers. Although I know that my freedom is less than that of a passenger, I appreciate that freedom as I have imbibed through and through the central teaching of the *Gita* that man is the maker of his own destiny in the sense that he has freedom of choice as to the manner in which he uses that freedom. But he is no controller of results. The moment he thinks he is, he comes to grief.

—*Harijan* : March 23, 1940.

37. TRUE EVANGELISM

Q. Do you see a reason for Christian workers in the West to come here, and, if so, what is their contribution?

A. In the manner in which they are working, there would seem to be no room for them. Quite unconsciously, they do harm to themselves and so to us. It is, perhaps, impertinent for me to say that they do harm to themselves, but quite pertinent to say that they do harm to us. They do harm to those amongst whom they work and those amongst whom they do not work, *i.e.*, the harm is done to the whole of India. They present a Christianity of their belief, but not the message of Jesus as I understand it. The more I study their activities the more sorry I become. There is such a gross misunderstanding of religion on the part of those who are intelligent, very far advanced, and whose motives need not be questioned. It is a tragedy that such a thing should happen in the human family.

Work in a Religious Spirit

Q. You are referring to things as they are at present. Do you visualize a situation in which there is a different approach?

A. Your ability is unquestioned. You can utilize all those abilities for the service of India which she would appreciate. That can only happen if there are no mental reservations. If you come to give education, you must give it after the Indian pattern. You should sympathetically study our institutions and suggest changes. But you come with preconceived notions and seek to destroy. If people from the West came on Indian terms, they would supply a felt want. When Americans come and ask me what service they can render, I tell them: 'If you dangle your millions before us, you will make beggars of us and demoralize us. But in one thing I do not mind being a beggar. I woud beg of you your scientific talent. You can ask your engineers and agricultural experts to place their services at our disposal. They must not come to us as our lords and masters, but as volunteer workers. A paid servant would throw up his job any day, but a volunteer worker could not do so. If such come, the more the merrier. A Mysore engineer (who is a Pole) has sent me a box of handmade tools made to suit village requirements. Supposing an engineer of that character comes and studies our tools and our cottage machines and suggests improvements in them, he would be of great service. If you do this kind of work in a religious spirit, you will have delivered the message of Jesus.

Life is More Eloquent than Lips

Q. Apart from the contribution through the realm of scientific achievement, evangelism seems to you to be out of the question in establishing relationships between East and West?

A. I do say that. But I speak with a mental reservation. I cannot only reconcile myself to—I must recognize—a fact in Nature which it is useless to gainsay—I mean proper evangelization. When you feel you have received peace from your particular interpretation of the *Bible*, you share it with others. But you do not need to give vocal expression to it. Your whole life is more eloquent than your lips. Language is always an obstacle to the full expression of thought. How, for instance, will you tell a man to read the *Bible* as YOU read it, how by word of mouth will you transfer to him the light as you receive it from day to day and moment to moment? Therefore, all religions say: 'Your life is your speech.' If you are humble enough, you will say you cannot adequately represent your religion by speech or pen.

Language of the Soul

Q. But may not one, in all humility, say: 'I know that my life falls far short of the ideal, let me explain the ideal I stand for'?

A. No. You bid good-bye to humility the moment you say that life is not adequate and that you must supplement it by speech. Human species need not go to animals and shout to them: 'We are humans.' The animals know them as humans. The language of the soul never lends itself to expression. It rises superior to the body. Language is a limitation of the truth which can be only represented by life.

Life is Its Own Expression

Q. How, then, is experience to be passed on from generation to generation without some articulate expression?

A. There is no occasion for articulate expression. Life is its own expression. I take the simile of the rose I used years ago. The rose does not need to write a book or deliver a sermon on the scent it sheds all around, or on the beauty which everyone who has eyes can see. Well, spiritual life is infinitely superior to the beautiful and fragrant rose, and I make bold to say that the moment there is a spiritual expression in life, the surroundings will readily respond. There are passages in the *Bible*, the *Gita*, the *Bhagavat*, the *Quran*, which eloquently show this. "Wherever," we read, "Krishna appeared, people acted like those possessed." The same thing about Jesus. But, to come nearer home, why are people touched as if by magic wherever Jawaharlal goes? They sometimes do not even know he has come, and yet they take sudden fire from the very thought that he is coming. Now there it may not be described as a spiritual influence, but there is a subtle influence and it is unquestionably there, call it by what name you like. They do not want to hear him, they simply want to see him. And that is natural. You cannot deal with millions in any other way. Spiritual life has greater potency than Marconi waves. When there is no medium between me and my Lord and I simply become a willing vessel for His influences to flow into it, then I overflow as the water of the Ganges at its source. There is no desire to speak when one lives the truth. Truth is most economical of words. There is thus no truer or other evangelism than life.

Source of Life

Q. But if a person were to ask the source of such a life, what then?

A. Then you will speak, but your language will be well thought out. You will yourself feel that. It defies expression. But then the questioner probes further, if he is a searcher. Then you will draw him to you. You will not need to go to him. Your fame will so spread that people from all parts of the world will flock to see you and listen to you. You will then speak to them. Take Aurobindo Ghose. Many from all parts go to him. He does not even see them, except on two days during the year, and never talks to them.

Economy of Words and Action

Q. Do you see any indication that there is a drawing together of those who have intimations of a higher life?

A. Yes. But not through these organizations. They are a bar to the process. Why am I at Sevagram? Because I believe that my message will have a better chance of penetrating the masses of India, and, maybe, through them to the world. I am otherwise not a man capable of shutting myself up. But I am so downright natural that once I feel a call, I go forward with it whatever happens. Economy of words and action has, therefore, its value. Only it has to be natural.

—*Harijan*, Dec. 12, 1936

38. IF JESUS CAME TO EARTH AGAIN

Q. Why do you object to proselytization as such? Is not there enough in the *Bible* to authorize us to invite people to a better way of life?

A. Oh yes, but it does not mean that they should be made members of the Church. If you interpret your texts in the way you seem to do, you straightaway condemn a large part of humanity unless it believes as you do. If Jesus came to earth again, he would disown many things that are being done in the name of Christianity. It is not he who says 'Lord, Lord' that is a Christian, but 'He that doeth the will of the Lord' that is a true Christian. And cannot he, who has not heard the name of Jesus Christ, do the will of the Lord?

—*Harijan* : May 11, 1935.

39. TRUE SERVICE

A Christian Friend: Can there be any service without religion?

Gandhiji: Why, service which has not the slightest touch of self in it is itself the highest religion.

A Christian Friend: But one must be devoted to someone?

Gandhiji: Yes, to Truth. I am devoted to none but Truth, and I owe no discipline to anybody but Truth.

A Christian Friend: But how is one to get inspiration from this general idea?

Gandhiji: That means to say that you want a God who has form, Truth is too impersonal for you? Well, idolatry is embedded in human nature. But you may, if you like, worship God as Truth, if not Truth as God. God is Truth, but God is many other things also. That is why I prefer to say Truth is God. But you need not go into what may sound like mystic lore; you may simply worship what you find to be the Truth, for Truth is known relatively. Only remember that Truth is not one of the many qualities that we name. It is the living embodiment of God, it is the only Life, and I identify Truth with fullest life, and that is how it becomes a concrete thing, for God is His whole creation, the whole Existence, and service of all that exists—Truth—is service of God.

—*Harijan* : May 25, 1935.

40. 'JUDGE NOT LEST YE BE JUDGED'

I BELIEVE that there is no such thing as conversion from one faith to another in the accepted sense of the term. It is a highly personal matter for the individual and his God. I may not have any design upon my neighbour as to his faith, which I must honour even as I honour my own. For, I regard all the great religions of the world as true, at any rate for the people professing them, as mine is true for me. Having reverently studied the scriptures of the world, I have no difficulty in perceiving the beauties in all of them. I could no more think of asking a Christian or a Mussalman or a Parsi or a Jew to change his faith than I would think of changing my own. This makes me no more oblivious of the limitations of the professors of those faiths, than it makes me of the grave limitations of the professors of mine. And seeing that it takes all my resources in trying to bring my practice to the level of my faith and in preaching the same to my co-religionists, I do not dream of preaching to the followers of other faiths. 'Judge not lest ye be judged' is a sound maxim for one's conduct.

Appeal to Christian Missions

It is a conviction daily growing upon me that the great and rich Christian missions will render true service to India, if they can persuade themselves to confine their activities to humanitarian service without the ulterior motive of converting India or at least her unsophisticated villagers to Christianity, and destroying their social superstructure, which, notwithstanding its many defects, has stood now from time immemorial the onslaughts upon it from within and from without. Whether they—the missionaries—and we wish it or not, what is true in the Hindu faith will abide, what is untrue will fall to pieces. Every living faith must have within itself the power of rejuvenation, if it is to live. —*Harijan*: Sept. 28, 1935.

41. 'THE LETTER KILLETH'

"THE letter killeth, the spirit giveth life." My very first reading of the *Bible* showed me that I would be repelled by many things in it, if I gave their literal meaning to many texts or even took every passage in it as the word of God. I found, as I proceeded with my study of the scriptures of the various religions, that every scripture had to be treated likewise, not excepting the *Vedas* or the *Upanishads*. Therefore, the story of the Immaculate Conception, when I interpret it mystically, does not repel me. I should find it hard to believe in the literal meaning of the verses relating to the Immaculate Conception of Jesus. Nor would it deepen my regard for Jesus, if I gave those verses their literal meaning. This does not mean that the writers of the Gospels were untruthful persons. They wrote in a mood of exaltation. From my youth upward, I learnt the art of estimating the value of scriptures on the basis of their ethical teaching. Miracles,[1] therefore, had no interest for me. The miracles said to have been performed by Jesus, even if I had believed them literally, would not have reconciled me to any teaching that did not satisfy universal ethics. Somehow or other, words of religious teachers have for me, as I presume for millions, a living force which the same words uttered by ordinary mortals do not possess.

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[1] "Q. Do miracles need an oratorical demonstration?
A. Miracles are their own demonstration." —*Harijan*: Dec. 19, 1936.

A Great World Teacher

Jesus, then, to me is a great world teacher among others. He was to the devotees of his generation no doubt 'the only begotten son of God.' Their belief need not be mine. He affects my life no less because I regard him as one among the many begotten sons of God. The adjective 'begotten' has, for me, a deeper and possibly a grander meaning than its literal meaning. For me, it implies spiritual birth. In his own times, he was the nearest to God.

Jesus atoned for the sins of those who accepted his teachings by being an infallible example to them. But the example was worth nothing to those who never troubled to change their lives. A regenerate outgrows the original taint, even as purified gold outgrows the original alloy.

I have made the frankest admission of my many sins. But I do not carry their burden on my shoulders. If I am journeying Godward, as I feel I am, it is safe with me. For, I feel the warmth of the sunshine of His presence. My austerities, fastings and prayers are, I know, of no value, if I rely upon them for reforming me. But they have an inestimable value, if they represent, as I hope they do, the yearnings of a soul striving to lay his weary head in the lap of his Maker.

Children of the Same God

The *Gita* has become for me the key to the scriptures of the world. It unravels for me the deepest mysteries to be found in them. I regard them with the same reverence that I pay to the Hindu scriptures. Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Parsis, Jews are convenient labels. But when I tear them down, I do not know which is which. We are all children of the same God. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, not every one that sayeth unto me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven shall enter the Kingdom," was said, though in different words, by all the great teachers of the world. —*Harijan* : April 18, 1936.

42. THE SEAT OF AUTHORITY

I DERIVE the greatest consolation from my reading of Tulsidas's *Ramayana*. I have also derived solace from the *New Testament* and the *Quran*. I don't approach them with a critical mind. They are to me as important as the *Bhagavad Gita*, though everything in the former may not appeal to me—everything in the *Epistles of Paul*, for instance—nor everything in Tulsidas. The *Gita* is a pure religious discourse given without any embellishment. It simply describes the progress of the pilgrim soul towards the Supreme Goal. Therefore, there is no question of selection.

Mathews: You are really a Protestant.

Gandhiji: I do not know what I am or am not. Mr. Hodge will call me a Presbyterian!

Mathews: Where do you find the seat of authority?

Gandhiji: It lies here (pointing to his breast). I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the *Gita.* I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason. Whilst I believe that the principal books are inspired, they suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly, they come through a human prophet; and then through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly. Mathews may give one version of one text and John may give another. I cannot surrender my reason whilst I subscribe to divine revelation. And, above all, 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.' And you must not misunderstand my position. I believe in Faith also, in things where Reason has no place, *e.g.*, the existence of God. No argument can move me from that faith, and like that little girl who repeated against all reason 'Yet we are seven', I would like to repeat, on being baffled in argument by a very superior intellect, 'Yet there is God.' —*Harijan* : Dec. 5, 1936.

43. DISTORTION OF JESUS' MESSAGE

AN English friend has been at me for the past thirty years, trying to persuade me that there is nothing but damnation in Hinduism and that I must accept Christianity. When I was in jail I got, from separate sources, no less than three copies of *The Life of Sister Therese,* in the hope that I should follow her example and accept Jesus as the only begotten son of God and my Saviour. I read the book prayerfully, but I could not accept even St. Therese's testimony for myself. I must say I have an open mind, if indeed at this stage and age of my life I can be said to have an open mind on this question. Anyway, I claim to have an open mind in this sense that, if things were to happen to me as they did to Saul before he became Paul, I should not hesitate to be converted.

But to-day I rebel against orthodox Christianity, as I am convinced that it has distorted the message of Jesus.[1] He was an Asiatic whose message was delivered through many media, and when it had the backing of a Roman Emperor it became an imperialist faith as it remains to this day. Of course, there are noble but rare exceptions like Andrews and Elwin. But the general trend is as I have indicated.

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[1] "Jesus caught a breath of wind from Asia and gave it to the world. It has been diluted in the West. You incorporated it into a system alien to it. That's why I call myself not Christian, because I do not hold with the system you've set up based on might. India's contribution to the world is to show this fallacy. The slopes of the Himalayas are white with the bones of our *Rishis,* who have given their lives to prayer, study and research. They have been trying for centuries to wrest the secrets of God from Him, and what they tell us is : 'Truth is God, and the way to Him is Non-violence'."
—*Entertaining Gandhi* : P. 163.

Harijan, May 30, 1936.

44. PROSELYTIZATION

C. F. Andrews: What would you say to a man who, after considerable thought and prayer, said that he could not have his peace and salvation except by becoming a Christian?

Gandhiji: I would say that, if a non-Christian (say a Hindu) came to a Christian and made that statement, he should ask him to become a good Hindu rather than find goodness in change of faith.

C. F. Andrews: I cannot in this go the whole length with you, though you know my own position. I discarded the position that there is no salvation except through Christ long ago. But supposing the Oxford Group Movement people changed the life of your son, and he felt like being converted, what would you say?

Gandhiji: I would say that the Oxford Group may change the lives of as many as they like, but not their religion. They can draw their attention to the best in their respective religions, and change their lives by asking them to live according to them. There came to me a man, the son of *Brahmin* parents, who said his reading of your book had led him to embrace Christianity. I asked him if he thought that the religion of his forefathers was wrong. He said: 'No.' Then, I said: 'Is there any difficulty about your accepting the *Bible* as one of the great religious books of the world and Christ as one of the great teachers?' I said to him that you had never through your books asked Indians to take up the *Bible* and embrace Christianity, and that he had misread your book—unless, of course, your position is like that of the late Maulana Mohammed Ali's, *viz.*, that a believing Mussalman, however bad his life, is better than a good Hindu.

C. F. Andrews: I do not accept M. Mohammed Ali's position at all. But I do say that, if a person really needs a change of faith, I should not stand in his way.

Gandhiji: But don't you see that you do not even give him a chance? You do not even cross-examine him. Supposing, a Christian came to me and said he was captivated by a reading of the *Bhagavat* and so wanted to declare himself a Hindu, I should say to him: 'No. What the *Bhagavat* offers, the *Bible* also offers. You have not yet made the attempt to find it out. Make the attempt and be a good Christian.'

C. F. Andrews: I don't know. If someone earnestly says that he will become a good Christian, I should say: 'You may become one,' though you know that I have in my own life strongly dissuaded ardent enthusiasts who came to me. I said to them: 'Certainly, not on my account will you do anything of the kind. But human nature does require a concrete faith.'

Gandhiji: If a person wants to believe in the *Bible*, let him say so, but why should he disregard his own religion? This proselytization will mean no peace in the world. Religion is a very personal matter.[1] We should, by living the life according to our lights, share the best with one another, thus adding to the sum total of human effort to reach God.

Consider, whether you are going to accept the position of mutual toleration or of equality of all religions. My position is that all the great religions are fundamentally equal. We must have the innate respect for other religions as we have for our own. Mind you, not mutual toleration, but equal respect." —*Harijan* : Nov. 28, 1936.

45. EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS

AHIMSA teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter. This admission will be readily made by a seeker of Truth, who follows the Law of Love. If we had attained the full vision of Truth, we would no longer be mere seekers, but would have become one with God, for Truth is God. But being only seekers, we prosecute our quest, and are conscious of our imperfection. And if we are imperfect ourselves, religion as conceived by us must also be imperfect.

All Faith are Imperfect

We have not realized religion in its perfection, even as we have not realized God. Religion of our conception, being thus imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution and re-interpretation. Progress towards Truth, towards God, is possible only because of such evolution. And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect, and liable to error.[2] Reverence for other faiths need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of our own faiths also, yet not leave it on that account, but try to overcome those defects. Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only hesitate, but would think it our duty to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths.

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[1] "Religion is essentially an individual matter which each one has to decide for himself." —*Harijan* : Sept. 19, 1936.

[2] "I believe that all the great religions of the world are true, more or less. I say 'more or less' because I believe that everything that the human hand touches, by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect. Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God and it is indescribable, untranslatable. I do believe that it is possible for every human being to become perfect, even as God is perfect. It is necessary for us all to aspire after perfection, but when that blessed state is attained, it becomes indescribable, indefinable. And I, therefore, admit, in all humility, that even the *Vedas*, the *Quran* and the *Bible* are imperfect word of God and, imperfect beings that we are, swayed to and fro by a multitude of passions, it is impossible for us even to understand this word of God in its fulness." —*Young India* : Sept. 22, 1927.

Why Are There Different Faiths?

The question then arises: Why should there be so many different faiths? The Soul is one, but the bodies which She animates are many. We cannot reduce the number of bodies; yet we recognize the unity of the Soul. Even as a tree has a single trunk, but many branches and leaves, so is there one true and perfect Religion, but it becomes many, as it passes through the human medium. The one Religion is beyond all speech. Imperfect men put it into such language as they can command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Whose interpretation is to be held to be the right one? Everybody is right from his own standpoint, but it is not impossible that everybody is wrong. Hence the necessity for tolerance, which does not mean indifference towards one's own faith, but a more intelligent and purer love for it. Tolerance gives us spiritual insight, which is as far from fanaticism as the North Pole from the South. True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between faith and faith. Cultivation of tolerance for other faiths will impart to us a truer understanding of our own.

Tolerance obviously does not disturb the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil. The reference here throughout is naturally to the principal faiths of the world. They are all based on common fundamentals. They have all produced great saints.

Equimindedness

When I was turning over the pages of the sacred books of different faiths for my own satisfaction, I became sufficiently familiar for my purpose with Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Hinduism. In reading these texts, I can say, I was equiminded towards all these faiths, although perhaps I was not then conscious of it. Refreshing my memory of those days, I do not find I ever had the slightest desire to criticize any of those religions merely because they were not my own, but read each sacred book in a spirit of reverence, and found the same fundamental morality in each. Some things I did not understand then, and do not understand even now, but experience has taught me that it is a mistake hastily to imagine that anything that we cannot understand is necessarily wrong. Some things which I did not understand first have since become as clear as daylight. Equimindedness helps us to solve many difficulties and even when we criticize anything, we express ourselves with a humility and a courtesy which leave no sting behind them.

The Golden Rule

The acceptance of the doctrine of Equality of Religions does not abolish the distinction between religion and irreligion. We do not propose to cultivate toleration for irreligion. That being so, some people might object that there would be no room left for equimindedness, if everyone took his own decision as to what was religion and what was irreligion. If we follow the Law of Love, we shall not bear any hatred towards the irreligious brother. On the contrary, we shall love him, and therefore either we shall bring him to see the error of his ways, or he will point out our error, or each will tolerate the other's difference of opinion. If the other party does not observe the Law of Love, he may be violent to us. If, however, we cherish real love for him, it will overcome his bitterness in the end. All obstacles in our path will vanish, if only we observe the golden rule that we must not be impatient with those whom we may consider to be in error, but must be prepared, if need be, to suffer in our own person.

—*From Yeravda Mandir,* Chapters X & XI.

46. BRANCHES OF THE SAME TREE

FOR me, the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree. Therefore, they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect. It is impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style that goes on in India and elsewhere today. It is an error which is, perhaps, the greatest impediment to the world's progress towards peace. 'Warring creeds' is a blasphemous expression. And it fitly describes the state of things in India, the Mother—as I believe her to be—of Religion or religions. If she is truly the Mother, the motherhood is on trial. Why should a Christian want to convert a Hindu to Christianity and *vice versa?* Why should he not be satisfied if the Hindu is a good or godly man? If the morals of a man is a matter of no concern, the form of worship in a particular manner in a church, a mosque or a temple is an empty formula; it may even be a hindrance to individual or social growth, and insistence on a particular form or repetition of a credo may be a potent cause of violent quarrels leading to bloodshed and ending in utter disbelief in Religion *i.e.* God Himself.

—*Harijan* : Jan. 30, 1937.

47. MY REACTION TO CHRISTIANITY

EVEN when I was 18, I came in touch with good Christians in London. Before that I had come in touch with what I used then to call 'beef and beer-bottle Christianity,' for these were regarded as the indispensable criteria of a man becoming a Christian, with also a third thing, namely adoption of a European style of dress. Those Christians were parodying St. Paul's teaching—'Call thou nothing unclean.' I went to London, therefore, with that prejudice against Christianity. I came across good Christians there who placed the *Bible* in my hands. Then, I met numerous Christians in South Africa, and I have since grown to this belief that Christianity is as good and as true a religion as my own. For a time, I struggled with the question: 'Which was the true religion out of those I knew?' But, ultimately, I came to the deliberate conviction that there was no such thing as only one true religion and every other false. There is no religion that is absolutely perfect. All are equally imperfect or, more or less, perfect. Hence, the conclusion that Christianity is as good and true as my own religion. But so also about Islam or Zoroastrianism or Judaism.

Jesus is as Divine as Other Prophets

I, therefore, do not take as literally true the text that Jesus is the only begotten son of God. God cannot be the exclusive Father and I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mohammed or Zoroaster. Similarly, I do not regard every word of the *Bible* as the inspired word of God even as I do not regard every word of the *Vedas* or the *Quran* as inspired. The *sum total* of each of these books is certainly inspired, but I miss that inspiration in many of the things taken individually. The *Bible* is as much a book of religion with me as the *Gita* and the *Quran*.[1]

I would also dispute the claim that Christianity is the *only* true religion. It is *also* a true religion, a noble religion and, along with other religions, it has contributed to raise the moral height of mankind. But it has yet to make a greater contribution. After all, what are 2,000 years in the life of a religion? Just now, Christianity comes to yearning mankind in a tainted form. Fancy, bishops supporting slaughter in the name of Christianity!

Fundamental Maxims

Q. But, when you say that all religions are true, what do you do when there are conflicting counsels?

A. I have no difficulty in hitting upon the truth, because I go by certain fundamental maxims. Truth is superior to everything, and I reject what conflicts with it. Similarly, that which is in conflict with non-violence should be rejected. And, on matters which can be reasoned out, that which conflicts with reason must also be rejected.

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[1] "I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the *Vedas*. I believe the *Bible*, the *Quran*, and the *Zend Avesta* to be as much divinely inspired as the *Vedas*. My belief in the Hindu Scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired. Nor do I claim to have any first hand knowledge of these wonderful books. But I do claim to know and feel the truths of the essential teaching of the scriptures. I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense." —*Young India*: Oct. 6, 1921.

Q. In matters which can be reasoned out?

A. Yes, there are subjects where reason cannot take us far and we have to accept things on faith. Faith then does not contradict reason but transcends it. Faith is a kind of sixth sense which works in cases which are without the purview of reason. Well then, given these three criteria, I can have no difficulty in examining all claims made on behalf of religion. Thus, to believe that Jesus is the only begotten son of God is to me against reason, for God can't marry and beget children. The word 'son' there can only be used in a figurative sense. In that sense, everyone who stands in the position of Jesus is a begotten son of God. If a man is spiritually miles ahead of us, we may say that he is, in a special sense, the son of God, though we are all children of God. We repudiate the relationship in our lives, whereas his life is a witness to that relationship.

No Degrees of Divinity

Q. Then, you will recognize degrees of divinity. Would you not say that Jesus was the most divine?

A. No, for the simple reason that we have no data. Historically, we have more data about Mohammed than anyone else because he was more recent in time. For Jesus, there is less data and still less for Buddha, Rama and Krishna; and when we know so little about them, is it not preposterous to say that one of them was more divine than another? In fact, even if there were a great deal of data available, no judge should shoulder the burden of sifting all the evidence; if only for this reason that it requires a highly spiritual person to guage the degree of divinity of the subjects he examines. To say that Jesus was 99 per cent divine, and Mohammed 50 per cent, and Krishna 10 per cent, is to arrogate to oneself a function which really does not belong to man.

—*Harijan* : March 6, 1937.

48. ALL RELIGIONS ARE EQUAL

Mr. Keithan: I would say it is no use comparing religions. They are different ways. Do you think we can explain the thing in different terms?

Gandhiji: You are right when you say that it is impossible to compare them. But the deduction from it is that they are equal. All men are born free and equal, but one is much stronger or weaker than another physically and mentally. Therefore, superficially, there is no equality between the two. But there is an essential equality. In our nakedness, God is not going to think of me as Gandhi and you as Keithan. And what are we in this mighty universe? We are less than atoms, and as between atoms there is no such thing which is smaller and which is bigger. Inherently, we are equal. The differences of race and skin and of mind and body and of climate and nation are transitory. In the same way, essentially, all religions are equal. If you read the *Quran*, you must read it with the eye of the Muslim; if you read the *Bible*, you must read it with the eye of the Christian; if you read the *Gita*, you must read it with the eye of a Hindu. Where is the use of scanning details and then holding up a religion to ridicule? Take the very first chapter of the Genesis or of Matthew. We read a long pedigree and then, at the end, we are told Jesus was born of a virgin. You come up against a blind wall. But I must read it with the eye of a Christian.

Mr. Keithan: Then, even in our *Bible*, there is the question of Moses and Jesus. We must hold them to be equal?

Gandhiji: Yes. All prophets are equal. It is a horizontal plane.

Mr. Keithan: If we think in terms of Einstein's Relativity, all are equal. But I cannot happily express the equality.

Gandhiji: That is why I say they are equally true, and equally imperfect. The finer the line you draw, the nearer it approaches Euclid's true straight line, but it never is the true straight line. The tree of Religion is the same, there is not that physical equality between the branches. They are all growing, and the person who belongs to the growing branch must not gloat over it and say: 'Mine is the superior one.' None is superior, none is inferior, to the other.

—*Harijan* : March 13, 1937.

49. WHY CIRCUMSCRIBE POWER OF GOD?

A Catholic Father: The Catholics believe that God revealed to them the true way.

Gandhiji: But why do you say that the will of God is expressed only in one book called the *Bible* and not in others? Why do you circumscribe the power of God?

A Catholic Father: But Jesus proved that he had received the word of God through miracles.

Gandhiji: But that is Mohammed's claim, too. If you accept Christian testimony, you must accept Muslim testimony and Hindu testimony, too.

A Catholic Father: But Mohammed said he could not do miracles.

Gandhiji: No. He did not want to prove the existence of God by miracles. But he claimed to receive messages from God.

—*Harijan* : March 13, 1937.

50. REAL CONVERSION

If a person, through fear, compulsion, starvation or for material gain or consideration, goes over to another faith, it is a misnomer to call it conversion. Most cases of mass conversions have been, to my mind, false coin. Real conversion springs from the heart and at the prompting of God, not of a stranger. The voice of God can always be distinguished from the voice of man. And, as I believe in the equality of all the great religions of the earth, I regard no man as polluted because he has forsaken the branch on which he was sitting and gone over to another of the same tree. If he comes back to the original branch, he deserves to be welcomed and not told that he had committed a sin by reason of his having forsaken the family to which he belonged. In so far as he may be deemed to have erred, he has sufficiently purged himself of it when he repents of the error and retraces his step. —*Harijan* : Sept. 25, 1937.

51. CONVERSION WITHOUT CONVICTION

Q. You oppose all conversion without conviction. But are you not inconsistent? You profess equal respect for all religions. Why, then, worry about how the conversion is brought about?

A. Conversion without conviction is a mere change and not conversion, which is a revolution in one's life. You seem, too, to forget that equal respect implies respect for my own faith as much as for yours or any other neighbour's. My respect for my own faith forbids my being indifferent to my children abandoning their parents' faith without conviction. And I should have little respect for you if you led my children astray by making all kinds of worldly promises in which matters of spirit had no play. —*Harijan* : March 29, 1942.

52. PLACE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Q. What is the place of Christian missions in the new India that is being built up to-day? What can they do to help in this great task?

A. To show appreciation of what India is and is doing. Up till now, they have come as teachers and preachers with queer notions about India and India's great religions. We have been described as a nation of superstitious heathens, knowing nothing, denying God. We are a brood of Satan as Murdoch would say. Did not Bishop Heber, in his well-known hymn "From Greenland's icy mountains," describe India as a country where "every prospect pleases and only man is vile"? To me, this is a negation of the spirit of Christ. My personal view, therefore, is that, if you feel that India has a message to give to the world, that India's religions too are true, though like all religions imperfect for having percolated through imperfect human agency, and you come as fellow-helpers and fellow-seekers, there is a place for you here. But if you come as preachers of the 'true Gospel' to a people who are wandering in darkness, so far as I am concerned, you can have no place. You may impose yourselves upon us. —*Harijan* : Jan. 7, 1939.

53. SHARING EXPERIENCE OF JESUS CHRIST

Q. Why may not I share with others my experience of Jesus Christ, which has given me such an ineffable peace?

A. Because you cannot possibly say that what is best for you is best for all. Quinine may be the only means of saving life in your case, but a dangerous poison in the case of another. And again, is it not super-arrogation to assume that you alone possess the key to spiritual joy and peace, and that an adherent of a different faith cannot get the same in equal measure from a study of his scriptures? I enjoy a peace and equanimity of spirit which has excited the envy of many Christian friends. I have got it principally through the *Gita.*

Your difficulty lies in your considering the other faiths as false or so adulterated as to amount to falsity. And you shut your eyes to the truth that shines in the other faiths and which gives equal joy and peace to their votaries. I have not hesitated, therefore, to recommend to my Christian friends a prayerful and sympathetic study of the other scriptures of the world. I can give my own humble testimony that, whilst such study has enabled me to give the same respect to them that I give to my own, it has enriched my own faith and broadened my vision.

Q. What would be your message to a Christian like me and my fellows?

A. Become worthy of the message that is imbedded in the *Sermon on the Mount.* —*Harijan* : Jan. 13, 1940.

54. A HOT GOSPELLER

Lady Emily: Don't you think Denmark has carried out your ideal of non-violence?

Gandhiji: Not a bit. It was a surrender, and what I have asked for is not surrender, but non-violent resistance.

Lady Emily: But Denmark did not resist and did exactly as you have advised Britons to-day!

Gandhiji: But I have not asked for unresisting surrender or capitulation. I have appealed to Britons and everyone in their plight to display the highest courage that man is capable of, *viz.*, to refuse to use arms and to defy the enemy to walk over their dead bodies. Denmark did nothing of the kind.

Lady Emily: But Denmark had no time. It was all so sudden, and there was nothing for it but for her to offer no resistance.

Gandhiji: I know, I know. But it is such suddenness that puts non-violence to the test. It was no doubt prudent on her part to offer no resistance. But prudence is not the same thing as non-violence. Non-violent resistance is far more effective than violent resistance, and that is what I have asked for from these nations which are so accustomed to violent resistance.

Lady Emily: Well, well, what's the good of it?

Gandhiji: What was the good of Jesus Christ laying down His life?

Lady Emily: Oh, that was a different matter. He was the son of God.

Gandhiji: And so are we!

Lady Emily: No. He was the *only* son of God.

Gandhiji: It is there, that the mother (she) and son (Gandhiji) must differ. With you, Jesus was the only begotten son of God. With me, He was a son of God, no matter how much purer than us all, but every one of us is a son of God and capable of doing what Jesus did, if we but endeavour to express the Divine in us.

Lady Emily: Yes, that is where I think you are wrong. If you accepted Christ in your heart and appealed to your people to do likewise, you could deliver your message with greater ease and far better effect. He is our salvation, and without receiving Him in our hearts we cannot be saved.

Gandhiji: So those who accept the Christ are all saved. They need do nothing more?

Lady Emily: We are sinners all, and we have but to accept Him to be saved.

Gandhiji: And, then, we may continue to be sinners? Is that what you mean? You do not, I hope, belong to the Plymouth Brothers, do you?

Lady Emily: No, I am a Presbyterian.

Gandhiji: But you talk like some of the Plymouth Brothers I met long ago in South Africa.

Lady Emily: Yes, I am afraid you were so unfortunate in the Christian contacts you formed in South Africa. You did not meet the right kind of people.

Gandhiji: Surely, you will not say that. I met a number of estimable people. They were all honest and sincere.

Lady Emily: But they were not *true* Christians.

Gandhiji: Do you know F. W. Meyer?

Lady Emily: Oh yes.

Gandhiji: Well, then, let me tell you that it was F. W. Meyer who after a long talk with me asked the other Christian friends to let me alone. He said to them that I was as good as converted, and that I did not need any formal process of conversion. But, of course, that did not satisfy them. And old A. W. Baker, who must be much over eighty now, is still at me. He writes to remind me time and again that, unless I accept Christ in his way, I cannot be saved.

But why all this quarrel about labels? Cannot a few hundred thousand Indians or Africans live the message of Christ without being called Christians?

Lady Emily: No, for without the grace of Jesus one cannot be saved. One has to accept Christ in one's heart. That is the definition of a true Christian, and I admit there are few Christians to-day.

—*Harijan* : Aug. 4, 1940.

55. WHAT JESUS MEANS TO ME

ALTHOUGH I have devoted a large part of my life to the study of religion and to discussion with religious leaders of all faiths, I know very well that I cannot but seem presumptuous in writing about Jesus Christ and trying to explain what he means to me. I do so only because my Christian friends have told me, on more than a few occasions, that for the very reason I am not a Christian and that (I shall quote their words exactly) "I do not accept Christ in the bottom of my heart as the only Son of God," it is impossible for me to understand the profound significance of his teachings, or to know and interpret the greatest source of spiritual strength that man has ever known.

Although this may or may not be true in my case, I have reasons to believe that it is an erroneous point of view. I believe that such an estimate is incompatible with the message that Jesus Christ gave to the world. For, he was certainly the highest example of one who wished to give everything, asking nothing in return, and not caring what creed might happen to be professed by the recipient. I am sure that if he were living here now among men, he would bless the lives of many who perhaps have never even heard his name, if only their lives embodied the virtues of which he was a living example on earth ; the virtues of loving one's neighbour as oneself and of doing good and charitable works among one's fellowmen.

What, then, does Jesus mean to me? To me, he was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had. To his believers, he was God's only begotten Son.[1] Could the fact that I do or do not accept this belief make Jesus have any more or less influence in my life? Is all the grandeur of his teaching and of his doctrine to be forbidden to me? I cannot believe so.

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[1] The word 'begotten' has for Gandhiji a significance that is more profound and possibly nobler than its simple literal meaning.

To me, it implies a spiritual birth. My interpretation, in other words, is that in Jesus' own life is the key of his nearness to God; that he expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see him and recognize him as the Son of God.

The Spirit of Jesus

But I do believe that something of this spirit that Jesus exemplified in the highest measure, in its most profound human sense, does exist. I must believe this; if I did not believe it, I should be a sceptic; and to be a sceptic is to live a life that is empty and lacks moral content. Or, what is the same thing, to condemn the entire human race to a negative end.

It is true that there certainly is reason for scepticism when one observes the bloody butchery that European aggressors have unloosed, and when one thinks about the misery and suffering prevalent in every corner of the world, as well as the pestilence and famine that always follow, terribly and inevitably, upon war.

In the face of this, how can one speak seriously of the Divine Spirit incarnate in man? Because these acts of terror and murder offend the conscience of man; because man knows that they represent evil; because in the inner depths of his heart and of his mind, he deplores them. And because, moreover, when he does not go astray, misled by false teachings or corrupted by false leaders, man has within his breast an impulse for good and a compassion that is the spark of Divinity, and which some day, I believe, will burst forth into the full flower that is the hope of all mankind.

Jesus' Example

An example of this flowering may be found in the figure and in the life of Jesus. I refuse to believe that there now exists or has ever existed a person that has not made use of his example to lessen his sins, even though he may have done so without realizing it. The lives of all have, in some greater or lesser degree, been changed by his presence, his actions, and the words spoken by his divine voice.

I believe that it is impossible to estimate the merits of the various religions of the world, and, moreover, I believe that it is unnecessary and harmful even to attempt it. But each one of them, in my judgment, embodies a common motivating force: the desire to uplift man's life and give it purpose.

And because the life of Jesus has the significance and the transcendency to which I have alluded, I believe that he belongs not solely to Christianity, but to the entire world; to all races and people, it matters little under what flag, name or doctrine they may work, profess a faith, or worship a God inherited from their ancestors.

—*The Modern Review* : Oct. 1941.

I like Anand Hingorani's idea of collecting my writings under suitable heads. The reader will not fail to appreciate the labours he has given to securing attractive printing & binding.

M K Gandhi

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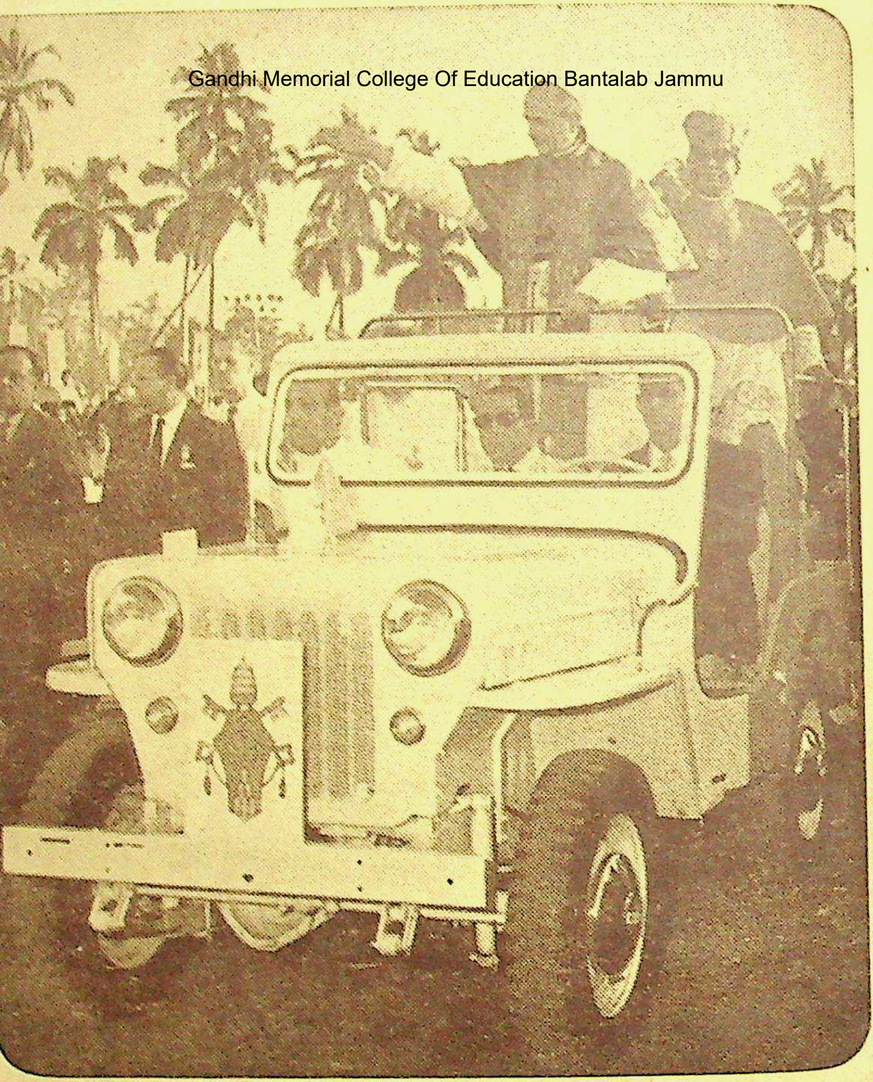
Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu
Acc. No. 3070 (D)
Dated 3/2/2016



His Holiness the Pope and Cardinal Gracias seen going around the Eucharistic Congress ground at the Oval in the JEEP specially prepared by MAHINDRA & MAHINDRA LIMITED